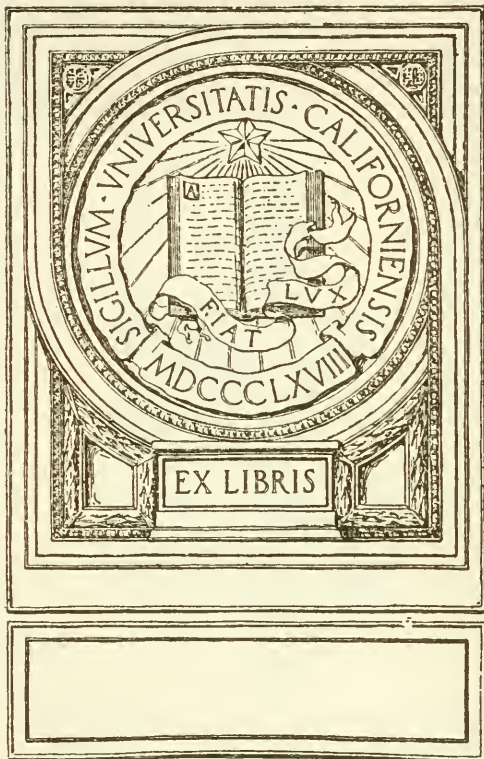




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ISABELLA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RHODA," &c.

"Take if you can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine.
'Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me,——I teach."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ISABELLA.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

“ The gods are just, and of our present vices
Make instruments to plague and punish us.”

SHAKSPEARE.

If appearances were to be trusted, Isabella at this period gave no great proof of the impassiveness which was so provoking to Lady Charlotte. When they met at dinner, her cheek was

VOL. III.

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pale, and her eye depressed ; she appeared abstracted, and had scarcely a smile even for the sallies of Mr. Burghley. From motives of delicacy, this ardent, but well-judging, friend, while he endeavoured to dissipate her sadness, did not appear to notice it. Policy kept Sir Charles equally unobservant ; nor did Mr. Willoughby let fall a word which could betray that he was aware of any change in her usual manner. But his eye was turned perpetually upon her ; he was diligent to shew her every trifling attention ; his discourse was directed to her, and in a tone that marked more affection than was his custom, except when they were alone.

Isabella was but too sensible of such marks of interest from the man whom she fondly loved ; and whom the result of her solitary reflections but an hour before had taught her to believe was

about to be torn from her from ever. Her hands trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and she was on the point of losing all self-command, when Mr. Dunstan's "wonder what *his Grace* will say to my spending my Christmas in this out-of-the-way place," was received by Mr. Burghley with such a shout of laughter, so well echoed by the disdainful tones of Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles, that no pathos could stand before it. Even Isabella smiled; and thus having a moment in which she could re-collect the scattered forces of her mind, she regained her power sufficiently to enter into general conversation, explaining the smile of which she was conscious, by saying, good-humouredly, to Mr. Dunstan, "the Duke cannot say less than that we are very attractive, and you very indulgent."

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Dunstan, who

was always in good-humour with Isabella, because she alone treated him with uniform civility, “ I dare say that is exactly what his Grace *will* say ; and, indeed, it is a great deal the truth. You *do* contrive to make Eagle’s Crag very agreeable ; and, I am sure, there is nothing in my power, except quite breaking with the Duke, that I would not do to save you from the *ennui* of a *tête-à-tête*.”

Lady Charlotte’s beautiful lips were drawn into a form which spoke the word fool ! as plainly as if she had uttered it ; and Mr. Burghley and Sir Charles again treating Mr. Dunstan with *cheers and laughter*, Isabella found the reins once again in her own hands, and resolved that if possible she would never again hold them so loosely.

The effect of the emotion that she had betrayed did not appear to pass so lightly from the mind of Mr. Wil-

loughby. Contrary to his usual custom, it seemed to have made an impression on his feelings that proved he feared its cause or its consequences. She was his first object when, after a short separation, the party re-assembled over their coffee. He took a moment when Lady Charlotte was running over the keys of one of the musical instruments, to say to Isabella,

“ You are uneasy : something disturbs you, you are not like yourself ; it is impossible that you should suppose—I am sure your good sense and candour are above suspicion — you must do me the justice to believe that you are inexpressively dear to me ; you cannot mistake compassion, and a fair appreciation of a thousand good qualities for any thing that can offend you. *She* is indeed to be pitied ; you see how unequally she is yoked ; and her fervent mind and warm feelings

sometimes betray her into manners and expressions that nobody can condemn more sincerely than she does. She has not your command of mind ; but you cannot be misled by all this. I am sure you know how to allow for weaknesses that you do not feel ; and you must rather wish to aid, than to condemn my efforts to lighten so hard a lot. If any misapprehension has disturbed this just view of things, I beseech you to correct it. You have not a more sincere friend than Lady Charlotte ; if there have been any fault or folly it is mine, not hers ; pardon what is past, and trust me for the future."

Mr. Willoughby might have spoken for ever. Isabella would not have dared to have trusted her voice in reply under the observation that was upon her ; she pressed the hand which he held out to her tenderly between hers, and rising, went towards Lady Charlotte.

“ I wish,” said she, “ you would sing that little Scotch air, which you were singing the other night.”

Lady Charlotte looked up to Isabella with a cast of countenance that really terrified her.

“ *You* wish that I would sing !” said she ; “ oh no ! I know my own inferiority better. Nobody would listen to my voice, while they were wishing to hear yours.”

Good God ! thought Isabella, can she be jealous of *me* ?

Extraordinary as it may seem, this was really the case at this moment, even to the point of breaking out into fury. She beheld Sir Charles’s prophecy fast fulfilling, and she felt that if Mr. Willoughby *did* once open his eyes, not only to the virtues, but to the charms of Isabella, that she would rival her in his fancy, as she had before done in his judgment. What then was she ?

degraded even in her own eyes ! disappointed in her revenge ! the deserted, neglected, and triumphed-over creature which she had so long destined Isabella to be !

These thoughts passed like lightning through her brain, and seemed to set it on fire ; she arose hastily from the instrument ; but Sir Charles, who saw that she was ruining both his hopes and her own, laying his hand gently on hers, and as disregardless of Isabella, as if there had not been such a creature in the world, he said,

“ You do not thus escape ; I would not forego the song you promised me for any gratification whatever.”

These words, accompanied by an intelligent pressure of her fingers, recalled her to commonsense ; and, resuming her seat, “ well then, I will sing,” said she, “ but I shall croak like a raven, for I have felt a cold coming all the evening.”

Nor did she undervalue her powers ;

the discord of her mind communicated itself to her touch and to her voice, and never did she make worse music.

“Lady Charlotte,” said Mr. Dunstan, “you play and sing horribly to-night ; for pity’s sake have done.”

“ You play like an angel !” said Sir Charles ; “ and sing like a seraph !” said Mr. Burghley laughing ; “ pray go on, were it only to convict Dunstan of having no ears.”

“ Would he had no tongue !” said Lady Charlotte ; and having given a little ease to her malignant heart by this morsel of mean spite, she sung her next song more like herself, and better deserved the plaudits that both Sir Charles and Mr. Burghley lavished upon her.

But from whence, thought Isabella, arises this change of scene ?

She could easily account for Mr. Burghley’s part in the drama, as aris-

ing partly from roguery and partly from good-nature; but to find Sir Charles in open alliance with Lady Charlotte, and to see Mr. Willoughby remain throughout the whole inattentive to what passed, absorbed in his own thoughts, and indifferent alike to Lady Charlotte's injuries and Lady Charlotte's attractions, had in it something so new and so unaccountable, that she scarcely believed that she was not in a dream.

Is it possible, thought she, that my sorrows are passed? Is there no more in the connexion that has been so painful, than what has been represented? May I trust for the future?

"Now," said Lady Charlotte to Isabella, and rising at the same time from her chair, "you really must take my place. You see how compliant I have been, even to my disgrace. You can fear no such consequence from obliging us."

Isabella sat down, but she felt for a moment that she could not command a note. She struggled to resume her powers, and not wholly without success. She chose a little plaintive air, which required small compass of voice, but she sung it with so much expression, that, low as were the tones, they reached the ears and the heart of Mr. Willoughby. He was instantly by her side : but he listened in silence, and when she ceased singing returned to his place on the sofa, from whence he had been roused. He did not, however, again fall into a reverie ; on the contrary, he took up a book, and appeared to be occupied in reading. The rest of the party fell almost into an equal silence, till Mr. Willoughby, as if suddenly becoming conscious of the general dulness, closed the volume, and said, “Burghley, do you really leave us to-morrow ? Is it impossible

that you should give us a little more of your enlivening company? It seems as if we should want it."

"It seems rather as if it were given in vain," returned Mr. Burghley, laughing; "but I assure you I should like nothing better than to continue your buffoon as long as you would tolerate me, if it could be. But I have played the truant too long; and although my good uncle never scolds, yet he can put his good-natured words into a certain form which I understand quite as well, and which I respect much more than I should all the scolding in the world; and his last letter shews me that he thinks it is high time that I was again in town."

"We may as well go together then," said Sir Charles, "if you have no objection, and don't prefer your valet's company to mine."

"What! will you too leave us?"

said Mr. Willoughby. "I thought we were sure of you, at least for another fortnight."

"I thought so myself yesterday," returned Sir Charles; "but my letters this morning have determined other-ways, to my sincere regret, I assure you. But if you should not all tire of rustication, I hope I shall be able to get down to you again before it is long, and bring with me all the gossip and scandal of the town."

"Oh! we shall have lost all taste for such things by that time," returned Lady Charlotte. "We are going to be rational and good, *à merveille*."

"*A merveille*, indeed!" returned Mr. Dunstan, with more than his usual quickness, though not with more than his usual good-nature, "if some of us are rational and good at all."

"You speak for yourself, I suppose," said Sir Charles, with a severe

look ; “and none of us are disposed to dispute your knowledge.”

“ Oh !” cried Mr. Dunstan, trying to get off from an antagonist whom he had by no means intended to provoke, “the present company, you know, is always excepted.”

This confusion of ideas made Sir Charles and Mr. Burghley laugh ; but Lady Charlotte’s fiery eye had not yet withdrawn its indignant glance, which her husband’s first speech had made her cast towards him ; and Mr. Willoughby and Isabella appeared to be absorbed in their own thoughts.

Indeed, nothing could exceed the astonishment of the latter at what was passing before her. She had not dared to flatter herself that Sir Charles would leave them ; and to find him determined to do, and with a tone of indifference so contrary to his usual manner, could not but suggest the suspi-

cion that there was something more than an unexpected call to town which was the occasion of his doing so. That there was an intelligence between him and Lady Charlotte she could no longer doubt. She had heard the latter say, “you are right, there is not a moment to be lost;” and his reply, “hush;” shewed that he feared she might betray what she wished to conceal.

What could be the connexion between them? Her worst suspicions recurred; yet how were such base purposes to be forwarded by Sir Charles’s withdrawing himself from Eagle’s Crag? She was resolved to try him upon this point.

“We are then to lose you to-morrow, Sir Charles?” she said.

“Not if you command me to stay,” said he.

“I am not used to command,” replied Isabella.

“ A wish would be sufficient,” said Sir Charles.

“ I have seen more powerful wishes than mine fail,” said Isabella.

“ More powerful! — Ah! whose can those be? — A word, a look would fix me to this spot, hard as it would be to witness what I must witness if I did stay, and which I dare not flatter myself I should be allowed to redress. But I shall offend you. In a word, I must be gone. That horrible scene in the park revealed to me a secret which, though it shall never pass my lips, warns me to be gone. I cannot imitate your heroism, and throw myself into the jaws of the lion, except it were to save something still dearer to the heart than even your divine little Godfrey.”

These words were uttered as they stood a little apart; and Isabella had only to step back a few paces to be

again in the hearing of the rest of the party. Her desire to ascertain what Sir Charles really meant had detained her till he spoke the last word; but it was scarcely pronounced when, with a look of such severe composure as chilled all the blood in Sir Charles's veins, she turned from him, and was again in society. She had not, indeed, gained any knowledge as to what grounds any understanding between him and Lady Charlotte could be founded; but she had heard a declaration so explicit of his sentiments for her, as justified the treating him from henceforth with the greatest coldness and distance.

“What!” said Lady Charlotte, “are you too unsuccessful? Could not your persuasions prevent the desertion with which we are threatened?”

“I did not use any persuasions,” replied Isabella.

“Shall I try my influence?” said Lady Charlotte.

“There is no point that I wish to gain,” said Isabella.

“Oh! happy Isabella,” exclaimed Lady Charlotte, “who has nothing to wish!”

“I am sure,” said Mr. Dunstan, “Mrs. Willoughby deserves to have all her wishes, for she endeavours to give every body else what they wish.”

“Logical!” said Lady Charlotte, with one of her most provoking sneers.

“I tell you what, Lady Charlotte,” said Mr. Dunstan ——

“No, no, my dear Sir,” said Isabella, who dreaded one of the usual explosions between this ill-matched pair, “tell me”——

“So I will,” said he; “and it is, that I wish to God that Lady Charlotte was like you.”

“Shall we change partners?” said the unblushing Lady Charlotte.

“Were you talking of whist?” said

Mr. Willoughby, suddenly rousing himself. "Let us have a rubber; it will do us all good. Conversation does not go on smoothly to-night."

Isabella, for once, was not sorry for the proposal; and instantly rang for cards. Fate decided that she and Sir Charles should be the excluded persons; and Isabella, fixing her eye for a moment steadily on him, as if to assure him that she was perfectly aware of his presence, deliberately walked to one of the book-cases, and, taking down a book, established herself at a table, with such an air of determination not to be interrupted, that Sir Charles did not dare to make any attempt towards conversation.

But although Isabella's eyes were upon the book, her thoughts were far away.

That the reserve and propriety of behaviour which Sir Charles had so

long preserved should suddenly be broken up by a tone of gallantry so undisguised and so affrontive to the purity and dignity of her character, she was persuaded could not be the inadvertence of an unguarded moment, for Sir Charles had no such moments; and, joined as it was to an intimation which could not be mistaken, that he was not unaware of the injuries to which she was exposed from the very person with whom she had so lately had a proof that he was upon the most confidential footing, seemed to leave no doubt but that such a change of manner arose from some detestable purpose, that was to be accomplished by exciting at once her jealousy and her resentment. It was impossible that the straight-forward spirit of Isabella could pursue the windings of such a labyrinth; yet she saw enough to put her more than ever upon her guard equally

against Sir Charles and Lady Charlotte ; but she resolved simply to keep the onward path of integrity and truth, and not to bewilder herself by any attempt at counteraction by plot or stratagem. .

It may be the will of the Most High to try me in the furnace of adversity, thought she ; but, with his help, I trust I shall come out as refined silver or the purest gold.

It was no more than necessary that Isabella should forget for a moment the natural timidity and self-diffidence of her character ;—to have doubted her strength at this time would have been to have fallen.

She was environed by circumstances that might have seemed to an affrighted mind to have justified yielding ; she felt her safety was in courage,—in being able to look in the face the desertion of her husband,—the treachery

of Lady Charlotte, — the profligacy of Sir Charles! — to see all this as it really was, and to take her measures, not upon what the weakness of hope might tempt her to flatter herself *might be*, but what the strength of her intellect told her probably *would be*. She was aware that what she had most to guard herself against, was the inconsequent manifestations of her husband's affections. Never did she catch a glimpse of the blissful vision of being permanently and exclusively beloved by him, but that her whole soul was melted into tenderness. Nothing else in life appeared to have any value; and she felt, that were she once to suffer the delusions of imagination to assume the reality of truth, and was *then* to be disappointed; that she durst not depend upon either her reason or her moral sense to preserve her from that tumult of conflicting passions which

scarcely ever settles but in the abyss of vice, or the depths of despondency.

With others to hope might be strength ;—with her she knew it would be weakness ; and her first care was to balance words by actions.

Mr. Willoughby had said, “ trust me for the future ;” but he had solicited the presence of Lady Charlotte. He had said, “ you have not a more sincere friend than Lady Charlotte ;” yet he allowed himself to be engrossed with this supposed friend to the neglect of herself. He had acknowledged “ fault, or folly ;” yet he advocated the cause of her who had betrayed him into such error. Isabella knew the conclusion that she should draw from such a statement in the case of another ; and she felt it to be her wisdom and her safety to act by it in her own.

Steeled by these reflections, she was

able, when called upon, to take her place at the card-table, to know the cards that she played, and to conclude the evening with ease, and even with cheerfulness. Mr. Willoughby seemed to be re-assured by her recovered composure, and the heterogeneous party seemed to fall into its usual form.

CHAP. XXXIX.

“ Now the distemper’d mind
Has lost the concord of harmonious powers,
Which forms the soul of happiness, and all
Is off the poise within.” THOMSON.

“ Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.” SHAKESPEARE.

THE next morning brought the farewell scene of Sir Charles and Mr. Burghley.

Sir Charles, by half words, by meaning looks, and by affected sighs, maintained, as far as the eyes that were upon him, and Isabella’s dignified coldness made possible, the tone of

sentiment and attachment that he had assumed the night before.

“It is impossible but that I should soon see you again,” said he, “as he made his last adieu; “if it were only”—he stopped,—held out a hand, which met no corresponding one;—sighed, and withdrew.

Not so, the frank and honest Burghley. With his eyes glistening, and his heart more full of compassion and admiration than he cared to avow, “God bless you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby,” he cried. “What shall I say of you, and from you, to the thousand and one friends who will overwhelm me with inquiries of how you do?—what you do?—and when they shall see you?—May I say there is any chance of your being in town this spring?”

“No!” replied Isabella, “for I believe I shall remain here the whole of it. But it must not be supposed that

absence and distance will make me forget those who are kind enough to remember me. Most particularly, you must commend me to Lord Burghley. I know he will question you closely about me. Pray tell him that I am well ; that my boy thrives ; and ——.” She paused, as at a loss for a third article of agreeable intelligence ; she found none, and was silent.

“ Oh ! doubt not but I shall have enough to say to my uncle when you are the subject. I shall tell him that his ‘ brightest star of the east ’ is become a northern luminary, and has dimmed the lustre of every other twinkler. I shall tell him——.”

“ No need to repeat your lesson to me,” interrupted Isabella. “ If you forget half of it, there will be no loss. I wish you would take a lecture from Lady Rachel upon flattery, hyperbole,

and metaphor ; it would do you infinite good."

" I like not her regimen," replied Mr. Burghley ; " no pouring in of wine and oil with Lady Rachel ; daggers and molten lead are her universal specifics."

" You are mistaken," said Isabella. " But see her from me ; and tell her that she is ever present to me, and rules every thought."

" Does she ever counsel you to add a little of the wiliness of the serpent to the innocence of the dove?" said Mr. Burghley, in a low voice ; " for surely you are a lambkin amongst wolves."

" You have been reproached before," said Isabella, smiling, " for false quotation. The word is *wisdom*, not *wiliness* ; and I can assure you that wisdom is much more Lady Rachel's Catholicon, than either daggers or molten lead."

“Then I pray you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, in her name,” said Mr. Burghley, “to be wise; and so give me your hand, and God preserve you. And if you should stumble on my unknown goddess in your walks, as I suspect you will, tell her that there is a mortal who adores her.” And so, with a most affectionate shake of the hand, he ran off to the carriage, at the door of which he found Sir Charles, and the two other gentlemen, grumbling that they were made to await in the cold the issue of his lengthened farewell to Isabella.

“Burghley is the happy man I find, Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, on returning to the breakfast-room. “You seemed as if you had scarcely a word for Sir Charles, notwithstanding what you owe to him; while you kept us all shivering in the cold to listen to Burghley’s rattle.”

Isabella coloured deeply at these words. "I really beg your pardon," said she; "but I was not aware that the remembrance I had charged him with to Lord Burghley, and Lady Rachel, had taken up so much time."

"I should not have observed it," returned Mr. Willoughby, "but that Mr. Dunstan here did; and Sir Charles seemed vexed."

Isabella again felt herself colour; and she coloured the more because she saw Lady Charlotte fix her eye upon her with the most marked and malign attention. She flattered herself, however, that Mr. Willoughby was not aware of her confusion, as he was busy arranging with Mr. Dunstan as to what dogs, and in what direction he should pursue his morning's intended amusement of shooting. Before this discussion was wholly finished, Isabella withdrew to her nursery, as was her custo-

mary practice after breakfast, leaving Lady Charlotte as usual to pursue her own purposes for an hour or two.

A part of this time Isabella generally dedicated to the prosecution of that course of reading which, since her residence at Eagle's Crag, had made a part of the regular distribution of her time; but this morning, when, after having indulged herself with playing with her boy, even for a longer time than usual, she retired to her book, she found she could not command her attention for five minutes together; and having read the same page three times over, without having comprehended a word of what it contained, she gave over the attempt; and arraying herself for a walk, she went out in the hope that the keen air, and a variety of objects, would brace her nerves, and settle the confusion of her thoughts.

Having wandered about for some time, with little choice or object, she struck into a sequestered path, which led her a considerable distance from the house, to a little ornamented building, placed at the edge of a thick cop-pice, and opening in front upon the lake and park. As it faced the south, it was generally warm and cheerful, even at the most dreary season of the year; and here Isabella proposed to find amusement by watching the deer, and the water-fowl, and the various other objects that the park and lake presented. The building consisted of two rooms: the outer one well fitted up, lined thickly with matting, and its windows and entrance so closely fitted, as nearly to exclude the outward air; the other was little more than a receptacle for some additional chairs and tables, for the accommodation of a larger company than usual; or in which

to make tea, when this retreat, which had once been a favourite spot, was chosen for such a purpose.

Isabella entered; and had scarcely seated herself in the place from whence she could command the most extensive view of the scene before her, when she saw, at a turning of a walk, Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby, arm in arm, directing their steps to the very asylum which she had chosen for herself!

To meet them was intolerable; but thinking herself sure of a retreat through the inner room, she hastily entered it, and drawing the bolt with equal precipitation, attempted to open the door through which she proposed to make her escape.

What was her dismay on finding it locked on the outside; and at the same moment to hear Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte enter the outer room!

Perhaps the best thing that she could have done would have been instantly to have made her appearance; but a moment of irresolution put this out of her power. The voice and tone of Mr. Willoughby was so impassioned and tender, as to throw her into an universal tremor, and she sunk almost helplessly on a seat near her.

In the situation in which she was, it was impossible not to hear every word that was uttered in the adjoining apartment; and in the relation which she bore to the speakers, it was not in human nature not to listen.

“Tell me not,” said Lady Charlotte, in the raised voice of anger, “tell me not of the warmth and truth of a passion which was alive to every shade of imperfection in its object,—which could darken those shades,—and which, on the cold balancing of prudence, could reject the thing beloved

for—what? for excellence, no doubt; but excellence that did not charm, and merit that could not make happy! Tell such tales as these, Willoughby, to children; but think not to deceive me. No! like the rest of your sex, you saw your triumph, and abused it! —you saw that the creature who was cold and haughty to your whole sex besides, would have been but too yielding to your wishes; and you preferred a sacrifice to your vanity to the gratification of your love! —cold-hearted, calculating, prudent Willoughby! And do you now come to solicit that as a beggar which you might have commanded as a sovereign? —aye, and the poorest of beggars! What have you now to offer me! —not even your name and hand, worthless as you have made them by their having been once the property of another! And why was she to be pre-

ferred to me?—in what might not Charlotte Stanton, without presumption, cope with Isabella Hastings? I even disdain the competition! The man who might have made the one his own, and chose the other, is not a prize worthy of contention.”

“How,” said Mr. Willoughby, “have I deserved this cruel burst of indignation? My sorrows *have* met with more indulgence; the friend *has* soothed the mistaken lover; and of the presumption of hope you cannot reproach me.”

“Yes, do upbraid my weakness,” said Lady Charlotte. “I deserve it well! Oh! Willoughby, how little have you known the woman whom you have abandoned,—whom you have undone! —whom, maddened by your desertion, in a moment of frenzy and revenge, bound herself to the stock—the dolt, to whom,—oh! wretched thought!—I

have made myself accountable. What was it that I would not, even at that very moment, have done or suffered for you ! In your hands I could have been any thing that you had desired to make me ! The distinction of having been your choice would have rendered all easy. But the world shall not see me degraded,—dragged at the car of Isabella Hastings!—the despised companion of the man whom she, with puerile plainings, might claim as her own, — the man whom she affects to love by rule and measure ! by the line of duty, and who seeks to be so loved in return ! — in whose presence your recreant passion quails, and dares not shew its head !”

“ Is it possible,” said Mr. Willoughby, “ that my deference for your delicacy, — my respect for your situation, should be so misconstrued ? And can you wish that I should outrage my

wife, and affront you at the same moment?"

"No, Sir!" replied Lady Charlotte, with the most insulting disdain, "it is *not* possible; nor is it possible that I should take a second place to any body; that I should be compelled to hear your querulous passion in a morning; and in an evening behold you watch, whether with fear or love you know best, the eye of your automaton wife! — see her the object of your solicitude, and hear her praises from your lips! No, Sir, this is *not* possible; nor shall it be endured any longer. This is not a part that even a *friend* can take. God knows with what innocence of intention, with what ardour of affection, I offered to cheer the solitude which your ruined fortunes make so necessary. I was willing even to conciliate your august spouse; but she scorns my friendship,

and appears to brave my powers ! and you, — gracious Heaven ! do I live to hear it ? — you to talk to me of delicacy, of respect ! of not outraging the person who has usurped my rights, and rendered me a wretch for ever !”

“ For pity’s sake,” cried Mr. Willoughby, “ be less violent. I entreat you to hear reason. Heaven is my witness how far I was from intending to pain you by any thing that passed last night. Too well *you* know how much reason I have for disturbed thoughts ; too well *I* know how unfairly I have trespassed on your goodness in accepting your most affectionate offer to remain here. Can I view the sacrifice you make without regret and pain ? — I who have it no longer in my power to repay by a life of devotion a tenderness such as yours, which, too ardent to be concealed, and too frank to be disavowed, is yet restrained

ISABELLA.

by motives which exalt you in my mind above all the rest of your sex. Can I contemplate my own situation? can I contemplate yours? and (I must add) that of an unoffending, innocent, excellent, confiding creature, to whose happiness I have solemnly sworn to dedicate myself? and not be exposed to the severest pangs of remorse; the deepest sense of misfortune? God knows how I have struggled to maintain an outward calm, when all was tumult within! — when I have rather been willing to incur the censure of thoughtless indifference, than to betray that I felt, as all but a villain must feel! And if in such circumstances a temporary dejection, — a momentary endeavour a *little* to lighten, *that only* part of this extended evil which *can* be mitigated, may have occurred, is such a transient, and only *apparent* swerving from the ruling feeling of my

soul, to be treated as a dereliction of that attachment which can end only with my life !”

“ Oh ! Willoughby,” said Lady Charlotte, “ speak ever thus ! and let my charmed senses be alive only to your accents ! And, oh ! thou dearest object of my heart, pardon my vehemence. Alas ! how dearly have I expiated a fault of temperament which I was never taught to correct. Pardon too my injustice. I acknowledge that I was unjust ; and that, for a moment, I could have rejoiced that you had been so too ; but, when my heart will let me, I know how to appreciate the superiority that decided your choice, — a superiority in reason, in dignity of character. Oh ! that they could have made you happy ! I had then been less miserable. How have we both suffered from the fatal error that led you to believe that a heart such as yours

could be satisfied with any thing less than a heart ! but let me cease such useless repinings ; be it now my only care to lighten the burthen which you have imposed upon yourself ; all that I can do, short of self-degradation, I will do. I disavow my petulance—my ravings. I will remain here. I will patiently endure, that you *shall* ‘endeavour to mitigate the only part of the extended evil which can be mitigated ;’ while I writhe under that which does not admit of cure or mitigation. Let her have all the merit of implicit obedience to the man she does *not* love. I will content myself with what may belong to my unreserved dedication of myself, short of dishonour, to the man I *do* ——”

“ Oh, beloved of my soul ! ” said Mr. Willoughby, clasping her fervently in his arms, “ how shall I thank you ? how shall I adore you enough ? ”

“ Forbear ! ” said she, as she released herself from his embrace, “ such transports can alone make me recall the promise I have given. A promise that I never would have given, had I not known my own power to maintain the limits by which it is bounded. I know the censure I should incur from the prudes of my own sex, whose virtue is their weakness, not their strength ; who dare not trust themselves ; who take shelter in hypocrisy ; but why should *I* conceal the emotions of my soul ? when I know that I can say to the most headstrong of them, thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.”

“ Admirable ! enchanting Charlotte ! ” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, “ what price is too high to pay for the distinction of being beloved by such a creature ? ”

“ Willoughby ! ” said she, with a

deep sigh, and laying her hand affectionately on his, "have done! heap not faggots on my fiery trial. Fain would I teach you to consider me only as a friend, a friend that wants as much consolation, as she wishes to afford. Think what a lot is mine; and do not aggravate its bitterness by shewing me how happy I might have been, if you had known what would have made your happiness. What is to be done? shall I go? shall I stay? can you be content to remain here, and abide in seclusion, what the slow operation of pinching economy may do towards restoring you to something like your former state? or will you by one vigorous act cut off hope and fear at once? sell all you have, discharge your debts, apportion your wife, and throw yourself on the wide world with the small residue?"

"I must not, will not, ruin my

child!" cried he in an agony. "And yet could I hope, said the guilty Willoughby, fervently grasping the fair hand that had not been removed from that on which it had rested for the few last minutes, "could I hope that my lovely friend would share my wanderings, — would illuminate my gloom—"

"No, Willoughby!" interrupted Lady Charlotte, "hope not from me any abandonment of my duty; gratified as I am by an ardency of passion on your part which so well knows what mine would grant, could I do so and retain my own esteem. As a wife I would have feared neither poverty, nor banishment; distance, solitude, deprivation, should not have separated us. But now our intercourse must be within the limits of our common society, or it must cease.

"It is true I owe my odious tyrant

nothing; and nothing would I pay him. Were you once free, I would soon free myself; but I owe it my own dignity that he shall not spurn me from him, for a man who has not even his name to offer me. I repeat it, were your bonds once broken, mine should not hold me, formed as they were under the most unholy auspices, and never sanctified by one after hour of peace, or love; but I will not be the *victim* of the *husband* even of Isabella Hastings!”

“ Oh, how you rend my heart with self-reproach! with excruciating regret!” said Mr. Willoughby; “ but the sacrifice would not be wholly yours; I too should immolate most sacred duties, most highly valued distinctions on the altar of love; but I urge not this plea, I am already sufficiently wretched without having your ruin to lay to my charge; but God knows

what I can do. I have thoughts of going to town ; perhaps some resource may be found short of what you have suggested. I cannot make my boy a beggar. I would rather waste out the lamp of life in the most miserable dungeon ; but I should have better hopes of success, if you, my beloved friend, were to be near me, to warn me from danger, to aid me by your counsel ; yet appearances would be better preserved, if you were to remain here. You might prepare Isabella ; you might support her. It would then at least be impossible that she should do you the injustice to believe that you injured her ! yet how can I bear to separate myself from my dearest friend ! my wisest, my most disinterested adviser, at such a critical moment ?”

“ I repeat it,” returned Lady Charlotte, “ that I go or stay, as you may

decide, or even, if you please, as Mrs. Willoughby may decide; hopeless as I am that she will ever do me justice, or allow me to be of any use, or consolation to her."

"Come, my beloved," said Mr. Willoughby, "let us walk. I fear the dampness of this place may injure you; and as we return to the house we will determine upon what is best to be done."

"Secure in our innocence," said Lady Charlotte, locking her arm within that of Mr. Willoughby's, we cannot fear the reproach of our own hearts, let us determine upon what we will; and I am sure that you and I alike despise the censure of an ill-judging world."

And with these words this guiltless and courageous creature, with an assured step, and an erect countenance, withdrew from a spot where she had been

putting into action every spring of a machine which she hoped was to plunge the object of her professed attachment into an abyss of misery and guilt. This unhappy being however seemed to have taken a much juster estimate of his own conduct, and its consequences, than did his more daring, and iron-souled associate. His face was pale; his eye downcast; his limbs trembling; and the arm which held his, communicated more support than it received.

CHAP. XL.

“ Alas! there 's no sound
To raise him short of thunder!”

BYRON.

BUT they are gone! and Isabella remains! and how does she remain? a motionless body, from whence the animating principle seems to be fled. No colour was in the cheek; no speculation in the eye. There was no power of action, or of thought: the heart, indeed, swelled as if it would have burst “its continent;” but the voice

had no utterance; the mind no consciousness; life and death seemed to contend for victory!

At length, "Oh God!" burst from her convulsed and colourless lips;—"Oh God, pardon him!" and the breaking heart was saved!

The awfulness of the appeal absorbed all mortal feelings. Wrongs! misery! were lost in the sense of the obnoxiousness of guilt.

The energy of prayer seemed to have restored her activity. Something perhaps she might do that might aid its efficacy. She hastily released herself from her confinement, and began to walk with a quick pace, she hardly knew whither, or for what purpose. But her strength seconded not her wishes: her limbs became trembling,—she gasped for breath: she was obliged to stop; to rest on the first object that was near her. The over-

whelmingness of recollection came over her, and with it such a conviction of the difficulties of her situation, as nearly to throw her into despair.

“What shall I do? teach me, thou Fountain of Wisdom, to do what will please thee best!”

And again she was calmed. She walked slowly forward; unable to determine for the future, and for the present more alive to the single thought of how she should endure the shock of the first meeting with her injurers, than to any other of the sad variety of which her wretchedness was composed. She struck first into one, and then into another circuitous path: she recoiled from the view of those walls that sheltered those whom she so much dreaded to see; and striking off from the usual entrance, she found her way into the house, as if she had been the guilty one, through a little private door, that

opened into a small hall, from whence went a flight of stairs that led directly to her own apartment. Here, to her surprise, she encountered Mrs. Evans, who appeared to be seeking for her ; and whose caution that she must not be too much alarmed, told her of misfortune ; and awakened her to a sense of danger.

“What? how? have they? has she?”

“Indeed, madam, he will be well again ; it often happens ; you must not be frightened ; the last fit was not so strong as the first. I have put him into hot water ; he is better.”

“Oh my child!” said Isabella, and rushed up stairs. Here she found the poor little boy just recovering from a severe convulsion fit, which, although no uncommon incident, at his age, seemed to the inexperienced, and half-distracted mother, as the agony of death.

“ I have sent for the apothecary,” said Mrs. Evans ; “ but I hope he will be quite well before he comes. I have seen many such accidents ; it is only teeth ; he will be well again in a few hours, and there is no particular danger of any return.”

Isabella's mind was now wholly engaged with the illness of her child : all that had passed so short a time before faded from her recollection ; she was sensible alone to the sufferings of the object before her.

Mrs. Evans's calm and judicious manner stilled however, before long, the agitation of Isabella's distracted feelings. She took the child upon her knee : her tears flowed, and she felt that the revulsion caused by this new infliction, had probably saved either her brain or her life.

She inquired for Mr. Willoughby, and found that he was not returned ;

but as she received this information, he hastily entered the room.

“ My dearest Isabella ! my love ! ”

Isabella raised her eyes to him, with a look of so much wildness, that he had no thought but that the illness of the boy had unsettled her brain.

“ My dear, dear love, be not so alarmed ! ” said he, clasping his arms round her ; “ our beloved boy will be better ; he will do well ; will he not, Evans ? ”

“ Oh you will hurt him ! you will hurt him ! ” said Isabella, struggling to disengage herself from Mr. Willoughby’s embrace.

“ Not for worlds ! nor you either ! ” said he, with the tenderest and most impassioned accent : and drawing a chair close to hers, he put one arm round her waist, and laid the other hand gently on the child. Isabella again looked up to him, with such a gaze of

wild surprise and doubt, as at once astonished, and alarmed him.

“Evans,” said he, “give Mrs. Willoughby some cordial. Rest your head on my shoulder, my love,” said he; “you have been dreadfully alarmed; but for my sake compose yourself.”

“I have indeed been dreadfully alarmed,” said Isabella. “For your sake did you say?”

“And for our dear boy’s sake,” said he.

“Oh Willoughby!” said Isabella, and burst into tears.

“Thank God!” said Mr. Willoughby, she will now be better.

Mrs. Evans quietly removed the child from Isabella’s lap; and Isabella, reclining on Mr. Willoughby, continued to weep; while the fondness of his caresses, and his anxious solicitude, seemed to make the tears flow but the more copiously. Calmness and self-

command, however, came with them; and the appearance of the medical assistant, centering again the whole of her feelings in the child, restored her to still further power of exertion.

She had the consolation to hear him declare that the paroxysm was passed; that all which had been done was right; and that there was nothing to be feared for the future.

“ You will then, sir, I fear, find Mrs. Willoughby the greater invalid of the two,” said Mr. Willoughby.

“ Isabella, my love, be kind enough to let Mr. Hawkins feel your pulse. Mrs. Willoughby has been terrified till I fear that she is really ill.”

Mr. Hawkins acknowledged that the pulse was extremely agitated and irregular; prescribed a composing draught; assured Isabella that she had no further reason for alarm; promised

to call again in the morning ; and took his departure.

Had this really skilful professor been aware of the extent of Isabella's moral sufferings, he could perhaps have done no more for her than he did ; but he would have done it with less hope that she would benefit by his prescription. Quiet was what Isabella knew she could not have ; but seclusion was of all things what she wished for most. As her fears for her boy had subsided, the wretchedness of her own situation presented itself the more forcibly to her imagination. A new sense of pain was excited by what a few hours before she would have felt as the foretaste of the happiness that she most wished for in this world. But how, after what she had so recently seen and heard, could she regard the solicitude shewn towards her by Mr. Willoughby, but as the grossest

hypocrisy, to cover the basest purposes? Never had she till this moment felt indignant against him; and the consciousness of anger towards an object so beloved, had an acuteness of pain that she thought more intolerable than any that she had ever felt before.

She sat absorbed, and silent; her cheek one moment a glowing crimson, and the next faded to a death-like paleness. Mr. Willoughby sat down by her, and, folding her cold and passive hands in his, "My dear Isabella," said he, "you terrify me: I never saw you so desert yourself. What is it that you fear? you must be persuaded that all danger is past; that we have nothing to do but to thank God for the safety of our dear boy."

"I do thank God; I do indeed!" said Isabella; "but—— pray leave me; I know I shall be better when I

am alone. But I have such a fixed pain *here*," said she, laying her hand on her heart, "that I cannot speak : and such a pain *here*," added she, removing her hand to her head, "that I cannot think. Evans give me the medicine that was ordered. I will lie down here—close to my boy ; let no body come near me but Evans for a few hours, and I shall be better."

Mr. Willoughby would have remonstrated against the place which she had chosen for her repose ; wished her to remove into her own room, and said that he would himself watch by her ; but she said, with something of impatience in her accent, "Pray let me have my own way ; if I must leave my boy, I shall go distracted. I would rather be alone."

Mr. Willoughby fondly soothed her, and embraced her fervently ; and again entreating that she would for his sake

do all that she could to recover her composure, very unwillingly quitted the room ; not without some suspicion that the alarm on account of the child's illness was not the whole cause of her malady.

And can all this be false ? thought Isabella. Can that open brow cover the basest heart ? Can those accents which seem to flow so spontaneously from the feeling, be suborned ? If I wrong him, I am the most guilty of creatures ! if I wrong him not, I am the most wretched ! The wanderings of his fancy, the surprise of his passions, I was but too well aware that I was exposed to ; but never could I have suspected him of premeditated treachery. Never could I have believed that he would have attempted to deceive, only the more easily to destroy me !

If this is so, no future moment can

give me peace. I can never cease to love; but the love of such a man, could I obtain it, could never make me happy.

Absorbed in her wretchedness, Isabella thought not of taking care of her health; but urged by Evans, she at length consented to put off a part of her clothes, and to lie down on a sofa, by the bed on which her child was now in a sweet sleep.

The sight of his serene countenance communicated some degree of calm to her heart, and she had just dropped into a kind of doze, when she started up:

“Did I not hear a noise?” said she.

“Oh, madam, my master will be so sorry!” replied Mrs. Evans; “I am sure he would not have awoke you for the world. He has been standing at the door all this time, and was so unhappy about you, that I could not but

let him just look at you, that he might see how quiet you were ; and it was his foot, just as he left the side of the sofa, that made you start."

No ! thought Isabella, this cannot be trick ; he may be seduced ; he can never be false. " Where is Mr. Willoughby ?" said she. " Tell him that I wish to see him."

Mr. Willoughby had not withdrawn beyond the outside of the door ; he heard the kind inquiry, and the welcome wish ; and was again in an instant by the side of Isabella.

" You are very kind," said she, stretching out her hand to him : " and I wished to see you, to tell you that I felt you to be so ; and that I am better, a great deal better ; and now leave me, and I shall go to sleep in good earnest."

" God bless you, my sweet love !" said he, kissing her ; " and pray be as

good as your word, and make us all happy again."

Us all ! thought Isabella : can he really believe that any body but himself—that Lady Charlotte cares whether I am ill or well ? is he indeed so much her dupe ? and is it indeed beyond my power to undeceive him ?

Something like hope followed this thought ; and in the indulgence of it she fell asleep, and slept quietly and soundly for some hours.

Nor had this short interval been less consoling to Mr. Willoughby. A strong apprehension that Isabella had, by some means, become mistress of more of the real truth than he wished her to know, had fixed itself on his mind. The wildness of her look when he first accosted her, he could have referred to the alarm she was under for an interest so dear ; but her manner of repulsing his caresses ;

her hasty question, “for your sake do you say?” her pathetic, and as it were appealing, “Oh, Willoughby!” the little consolation that she had seemed to derive from the assurances of the safety of her child; her pre-emptory desire to be alone; her want of compliance with his reasonable request, that she would not seek repose in a place where she was so little likely to find it; a something of failure in her usual gentleness of demeanour; all these circumstances bespoke a mind agitated by more than one painful feeling; the conscience of Mr. Willoughby was prompt to refer it to its true cause. On his first knowledge of the child’s illness, he had sought her from a genuine desire to console, and to be consoled, for the impending misfortune which seemed equally to hang over them both; and from a

tenderness of affection, which at the moment admitted of no rival. Lady Charlotte and her allurements had vanished from his imagination, and they were only recalled by the extraordinary and unexpected manner in which he had been received by Isabella; but they were recalled, not under the false colours with which Lady Charlotte's asserted innocence, and his own sophistry had invested them, but in all the naked horrors of their real guilt; and he felt himself at once the betrayer and the destroyer of the creature whom he had sworn to foster and protect. His whole future peace of mind lay upon the safety of Isabella; and in yielding to her earnest desire that he would quit her, he felt some consolation in affording her the only gratification which she seemed willing to receive at his hands. But to rejoin Lady Charlotte

was impossible! he found that he could not resolve to quit the door of the apartment which contained all that he thought he prized on earth. He had remained fixed as it were upon the threshold, from whence the compassion of Mrs. Evans had only induced him to stir, by the hope of seeing Isabella in a state of repose; he had now done more: he had seen her again at her own desire; she had spoken kindly to him; she had assured him that she “was better,” “much better;” she had promised to rest, and she had promised it in a manner that seemed to acknowledge a kind recognition of the interest that he took in her welfare. Mr. Willoughby’s fears for her life and health were dissipated, and he was ready to renounce the painful thought that he had in any way contributed to the disorder he had witnessed.

“It all proceeded, no doubt (said he to himself) from anxiety for her boy ; she loves him a thousand times better than she can love me ; and reasonably so ; and no wonder, if my very kindness was of no value, while she thought his life at stake. The moment that a little repose had calmed her mind, she returns to the even tenour of that regulated affection which her duty dictates to her as my due. Had she had a heart so formed for love as Lady Charlotte’s, what a happy man had I been ! but she is as amiable as possible ; and I am incapable of injuring her, further than by a preference which I cannot control, and which is sufficiently expiated by the misery it occasions me.”

By such hollow reasoning did Mr. Willoughby still the honest voice of conscience, which would have told

him what he was, and what he ought to be ! but the moment when she *must* be heard was not yet come ; and he sought Lady Charlotte to tell her that his boy was safe, and that Isabella would be quite well in the morning.

CHAP. XLI.

— “Thou art alone,
If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness,
Thy meekness, saint-like, wife-like government,
Obeying in commanding, and thy parts
Sovereign and pious, could but speak thee out
The Queen of earthly Queens.”

SHAKESPEARE.

HE had no cause to distrust his sagacity, when he saw that the child gave no cause for anxiety ; and that Isabella, although pale and wan, yet, with her wonted countenance and voice, resumed her accustomed ways

of going on ; and seemed not to have been aware, or to have forgotten, that there had been a moment when the attentions of her husband had been less acceptable to her than usual.

“ Nothing can be more clear,” thought he, re-assuring himself, “ than that the whole was occasioned by her alarm for her boy. I never gave her cause to suspect me of unkindness ; and I hope I never shall.”

The fact however was, that Isabella was so occupied in preparing herself for the future, that the past was less in her thoughts than a few hours before she could have believed possible. The genuine concern and affection that Mr. Willoughby had manifested for her, had suspended in her apprehension the certainty of the consummation of her misfortune. “ There was no purposed deceit.” “ She might be able to open his eyes to Lady Char-

lotte's true character." "Perhaps he had already abandoned the project of leaving Eagle's Crag." "If he did really love her—if he did care for her happiness—she might prevail with him to open all his pecuniary distresses to her; and she promised herself, that in any competition between Lady Charlotte and herself, who would do or suffer most for him, or with him, that she should come off victor." All these important questions were now at issue; and they could only be determined by her taking her accustomed share in the general society. She put aside, therefore, the horror that she had conceived of communicating with Lady Charlotte; she sacrificed her anxious desire of remaining near her child; and she joined the party at breakfast, at the usual hour.

It was, however, almost beyond the power of her forbearance to receive

with complacency Lady Charlotte's congratulations on the recovery of her boy, and her vehement assurances of the anxiety that she had felt on the report of the effect which the first alarm had had upon her health.

“Upon my word, my dear,” said she, “you look like a perfect rag now. This has been a worse adventure than the red stag. We must take a great deal of care of you, and nurse you well, or we shall have you sick when the little urchin who has been the cause of all this mischief is quite well.”

Mr. Willoughby fixed his eyes upon Isabella, on Lady Charlotte's thus addressing her, with so penetrating and scrutinising a look ; that a consciousness that he had remarked her repulsive coldness in return, made the ready blood mount to her cheek : but

she did not therefore relax the severity of her manner. She simply replied, "that when the cause was passed the effect would cease."

"Oh! yes," said Mr. Willoughby, "our dear boy is safe; and you will be soon quite well, and blooming as ever."

"I *am* quite well," said Isabella; "and as to bloom," and it returned as she spoke, "we all know how short-lived a possession that is."

"You and I, however," said Lady Charlotte, "may surely reckon upon its continuance for half a century to come."

"I do not reckon upon it for an hour," said Isabella, with a sigh.

"My dear Isabella," said Mr. Willoughby, "let us have no more such charnel-house observations; or you will force me to tell you, that I shall love you when you are old and wrinkled as

well as I do now in all your youth and beauty."

"And I hope you would say true," replied Isabella, with a smile of conscious worth: "I verily believe that you will love me better."

"God grant that you may say true!" said Mr. Willoughby; and he said it with a warmth, that clouded Lady Charlotte's brow, and made Isabella's heart glow. "I shall not be abandoned!" said Isabella to herself; and the thrill of delight which struck through every feeling, was scarcely subsided, when Mr. Willoughby, on Lady Charlotte's leaving the room, said,

"I wish to speak with you, Isabella; let us go into the library."

Isabella's hope died within her; she trembled; now she thought is the dreadful annunciation about to be made!

But it seemed as if Mr. Willoughby could not make it; the privacy he had sought he appeared not to dare to use; he walked to the books; he observed that some of them were not in their proper places; wondered that people could be so careless; from thence turned to the window, said it was a fine day, talked of the view; looked towards the fire, and rung to have more coals put on. Isabella could no longer doubt what it was that she was about to hear. Mr. Willoughby's timidity gave her courage; and when the servant had withdrawn, after waiting a moment to see if Mr. Willoughby would speak, she said, "I am quite ready to attend to you; you said that you wanted to speak to me."

"I do," said Mr. Willoughby; "but on my soul I do not know how to speak! There is nothing on earth that I wish more than to make you happy,

and yet it is my fate to make you miserable.”

“You cannot make me miserable,” returned Isabella, “except you wish to make me so. Any misfortune common to us both, you shall see I can bear, not as an additional burthen to you, but as a support and a comforter.”

“I know the calmness and strength of your mind,” replied he; “but I speak not so much of the sense that you will entertain of the evil, as of the wretchedness that I shall feel in having involved you in it.”

“Tell me what the evil is to which you allude,” said Isabella; “or rather let me tell you. You *do* know that I cannot be inadvertent of the difficulties under which you labour with respect to your property; and you *will* know that there is no measure of retrenchment or deprivation which you may think expedient to adopt, that I

shall not come into with the most unrepining acquiescence ; but then, my dear Willoughby, you must deal ingenuously with me ; you must let me know the whole truth, the extent of the mischief, and by what means you propose to repair it."

" I have such means, I confidently believe," returned he ; " but I doubt whether I should be able to make you comprehend them in all their bearings ; nor can they be prosecuted here : I must go to town."

" Let me go with you there," said Isabella, eagerly.

" Go with me !" repeated Mr. Willoughby, astonished, " what, and leave Godfrey ? and at this time too ?"

" I love my child through you," returned Isabella ; " and when the son and the father are in the scale, can you doubt which way the balance will turn ?"

“But you *cannot* go with me,” he replied; “I have not a place to shelter you in; Beechwood you know is gone, and if the town house is not sold, it must be, or disposed of in some way or other immediately.

“Let not this be an objection,” said Isabella; “I am sure Lady Rachel will gladly receive me.”

“No, no, Isabella; it cannot, must not be,” returned Mr. Willoughby. “I would not be exposed to the animadversions of Lady Rachel on placing you in such a situation for any consideration whatever; if you have any regard for me, you will not wish to give me so severe a mortification.”

“Then,” said Isabella (and she said it with the greatest earnestness of entreaty), “if you have any regard for yourself, for me, or for your child, remain where you are! if *I* cannot comprehend all the necessary details on

which to ground the remedial plan that you meditate, Roberts can ; you cannot have a more faithful or a more acute assistant. The sale of the house can as well be done by agency as in person ; no unnecessary expenses will be incurred ; the approbation of all, whose approbation is worth a wish, will follow your determination not to abandon your wife and child."

"Abandon !" repeated Mr. Wilmoughby ; " you speak as if a journey upon business was a dereliction of my duties. I go, only that I may pursue the best method to remedy evils, which I take shame to myself for having suffered to get so great a head, without having sooner applied a sufficient check to them. I cannot do this *here*. I had hoped that I might have done so ; I have considered the matter in all its lights, and I find it to be impossible ; do not give so reproachful a

term as abandonment to a necessary piece of self-denial."

"If this be so," said Isabella, "I repeat my request; let me go with you. Whatever is accommodation for you will be accommodation for me; and I dare affirm that Lady Rachel will better approve that I should be subjected to apparent inconveniences, than that I should be left."

"Ask me," returned Mr. Willoughby, impatiently, "what I *can* grant. It cannot be either that you should accompany me to town, or that I should stay here with you."

"I *will* ask you what you can grant," said Isabella. "Open your whole heart to me. It is not wisdom, it is not experience, that always furnishes the best counsel. The sagacity of affection often goes beyond them both. In this case your interest cannot be divided from mine: may I not

be supposed to be something of a judge what will best promote the happiness of both?"

"And can I be suspected of betraying either?" said Mr. Willoughby. "Isabella, you *must* rely upon me. There is no want of confidence. I would only save you the knowledge of many painful particulars; and, when you see the result, you will thank me for having spared you the details. My absence will not be long, and you will not be alone."

"Not alone!" said Isabella; "who then will be with me?"

"Lady Charlotte!" said Mr. Willoughby; but he said it with the colour rising even to his forehead, and in a voice scarcely articulate. "It is true," added he, gaining more courage as he proceeded, "that Dunstan is the most unpersuadable of creatures, and the most tyrannical; as all fools are, and

now he finds that I am likely to be absent, although for so short a time, he repents of his engagement to remain with us; but Lady Charlotte is true to her promise, and if she can hope to make her society acceptable to you, she will be most happy to be your companion."

"I beg," said Isabella, with as much of haughtiness as would sit upon her features; "I beg that I may be allowed to decline Lady Charlotte's company."

"You have a strange prejudice against Lady Charlotte," said Mr. Willoughby. "I should have thought that your relationship, and early habits of intimacy, would have enabled you to have known her better."

"It is not prejudice that keeps me apart from Lady Charlotte," said Isabella: "it is knowledge."

"Knowledge? knowledge of what?"

said Mr. Willoughby, with quickness.

“ Knowledge, that under the mask of the most ungoverned frankness, she is capable of the most consummate art. She cannot dupe me. I pray God that she may not dupe others.”

Mr. Willoughby stood confounded.

“ Good God, Isabella! what can you mean? How can you be so unjust?”

“ I am not unjust,” replied Isabella, calmly; “ and I again desire that she may not be my companion.”

“ Be that as you please,” said Mr. Willoughby. “ She will at least escape a little from the ill-humour of Dunstan, when she can tell him that she is likely to return to town. I fancy they will go to-morrow; and as—as—” he hesitated—“ as I *must* go, it will be best to take a seat in their carriage: it will save an unnecessary expense, as you observe.”

Mr. Willoughby looked as if he expected that such a proposal would have met from Isabella a most animated disapproval; or that it would have produced an emotion that would be extremely embarrassing to him: but Isabella was not taken by surprise; she had learned nothing from the conversation that had passed for which she was not fully prepared; and she received what she considered as the consummation of her fate, with all the calmness of despair.

“Willoughby,” said she, fixing her eyes intently upon him, “I am not deceived. You have refused to remain with me, or to suffer me to accompany you. There can be but one reason for this. Go, then! but be assured that, whether you go in a vain confidence in your own strength, or in the hope of an indulgence of your weakness, that you are about to tread

a path which can lead to nothing but misery and remorse. Under this conviction, I feel almost reckless as to what is to become of me or my infant. *If you will* destroy yourself, it may be best that we should all perish together."

"Dearest Isabella," talk not so strangely," said Mr. Willoughby. "I can no longer conceal from myself to what your suspicious point; but, by the God who made me, you do me injustice. You wrong too another, who is incapable of injuring you; who, sensible as she is of your aversion to her, never fails to acknowledge all your merits, and who is ready to administer to you all the offices of friendship. I go to town *wholly* for the purpose of arranging my affairs in such a manner as will enable me to return to you with peace of mind, and the means of making you happy for the

future. Do not deaden my inclinations to do this, by any perversity of construction—by any ungenerous suspicions of those to whom you are more obliged than you can even conjecture.”

“ I am sincerely persuaded,” returned Isabella, “ that at this moment you believe what you say. Yet all that I foresee will not the less happen. God preserve you ! Yet is it not presumption to pray for one who willingly rushes on destruction ?”

And as she said these words, her rising emotion becoming too powerful for control, she turned from him, and hastily quitted the room.

But she did not leave him without having made an indelible impression on his mind. It was impossible, in this instance, to mistake calmness of manner for coldness of temperament ; it was impossible to believe that any other human creature had a paramount

interest to his own in her heart. She had offered, for his sake, to quit an object that had hitherto appeared to be the darling passion of her soul. She had holden even this precious possession but as "dust upon the balance," not in competition with any selfish gratification, but in comparison of the safety, the peace, and the virtue of the man whom she believed loved another in preference to herself. She had frankly avowed her suspicion of the injustice done her; but neither obloquy, invective, nor rage, had accompanied her avowal: all sense of her own wrongs appeared to be absorbed in concern for the guilt of him who wronged her. She appeared as an immortal intelligence mourning over the sins of frail humanity; but she proved, notwithstanding, that she was no more than human herself, by the varying passions that had marked her

changing countenance, and by an emotion which had at length shaken her frame almost past endurance.

Could it then be that a comparison should not force itself on the mind of the wretched Willoughby? That giving to Isabella all that his reason and his moral sense could approve, left to Lady Charlotte nothing but the basest dregs of passion! A passion that he believed could never be gratified, but upon terms that he had not, that he did not wish to have to offer.

“Why should I not break my chains at once?” cried he aloud. “Why not, from this moment, be what I ought to be, and what until I am, I can never be happy?”

And it might have been that this virtuous thought might have sprung into action, had not the evil one stood before him in the form of a beautiful and a wicked woman.

Lady Charlotte was at hand : the closing of one door was a signal for her to enter at the other.

“ Well,” said she, “ is this dreaded interview over? How has she taken it?”

“ The interview,” replied Mr. Willoughby, “ has been even more dreadful than I had imagined it to myself.”

“ Oh! then mildness and indifference have at length given way?” said Lady Charlotte, with triumph in her tone.

“ There was no indifference ; and the mildness was unblemished,” said Mr. Willoughby.

“ Where then was the terror of the interview?” said Lady Charlotte ; “ reasonable as she is, she must have seen that you could do nothing but go to town ; and my offer of remaining here must convince her that you went there only on account of business.”

“She thought she might go with me,” said Mr. Willoughby.

“For what to do?” said Lady Charlotte.

“To watch over me; to watch for me; to save me from destruction;” said Mr. Willoughby.

“From whence are you threatened with destruction?” said Lady Charlotte.

“Not assuredly from the quarter that she suspects,” returned he; “but she has told me such truths, that she has convinced me that I am a villain, or on the point of becoming one; and if it were not for the discretion of my fair friend here (taking Lady Charlotte’s hand), perhaps I could not do better than grant one of the requests that she has made me; and either take her with me to town, or remain with her in the country.”

“And if you will take my advice,” said Lady Charlotte, withdrawing her

hand disdainfully, you will do the latter ; if our *friendship* is to be subject to such hot and cold fits, be assured that I will break this heart to atoms, before it shall longer own you for its master. Well then, you stay ?”

“No, I go ! and I go with you ; for, as we had foreseen, there is no wish to detain you here. I go too with her permission.”

“Oh, Heavens !” cried Lady Charlotte, “the difference between duty and love ! Had I her rights in you, would I part from you ? No ! I would hang upon you, not to be shaken off. I would manacle you. You might kill me, but we would not part. Willoughby, she does not love you : I *do*. I give you all I can give you without degradation ; I ask but your friendship in return ; and you insult me with a visible preference for the cold-hearted wisdom—yes, for once I will

“speak out—the cold-hearted wisdom of the woman whose legal property you are! You tell me you are a villain! What is it but to tell me that I make you so? And yet, but for me, you would indeed have been a villain.”

“For heaven’s sake,” said Mr. Willoughby, “between us two let there be peace. In vain do we each of us struggle with our chains; we cannot break them. Nor ought you to be jealous of the poor justice that my understanding yields to the merits of a woman who deserves better at my hands, than that any other should be preferred one moment before her.”

“Give her, then, her desert,” said Lady Charlotte, with the fire darting from her eyes; “and leave that heart to break which never beat for any one but you?”

“Torture me not!” cried Mr. Willoughby. “You know your power;

use it for my happiness, and not for my misery. You know I cannot exist without your acknowledged love: why then is it only to make itself known in reproaches and upbraidings?"

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" said Lady Charlotte, in a tone of deprecation the most tender and affectionate. "I am a wretch! and may it not be allowed the wretched sometimes to complain? Your friendship is my all; and is it a crime to agonize under the apprehension of losing it?"

"You can never lose it," said Mr. Willoughby. "Has it not stood out against your severity, and against the hopelessness to which you have doomed me? and can you fear that your kindness will not always have power to retain it?"

Lady Charlotte certainly at this moment did fear it. There was a calmness in Mr. Willoughby's assevera-

tions ; a distinctness in his reproaches ; there was a regulated tone in his professions of attachment, unlike the voice of passion to which she had been accustomed from his lips. She had not now to repress his ardours : she found that she was weighed in the balance, and she dreaded lest he might discover that his happiness was in the opposite scale.

“ Oh ! pardon ! pardon ! ” cried she. “ Forgive the doubts of conscious worthlessness. It seems as if your preferring love was a prize too high for qualities like mine. All that I have to give is love.”

“ And in that do you not give all ? ” said he. “ Oh ! my Charlotte, do not believe me insensible to goodness, to charms such as yours ! For once let me fold you to my heart, and let its throbbings tell you that it can own no other mistress.”

“ Let this single folly be the seal of our reconciliation,” said Lady Charlotte, gently, and without any reproof, withdrawing herself from his embrace; “ and let us never repeat it. It is time we parted ; we shall have eyes upon us ; there is a spy in every servant in this house. I long to get out of it.”

“ Go, then,” said he, kissing her hand again and again, “ go ; and eternal blessings attend you !”

“ Yes, I am a villain !” said he, as she closed the door, “ and I *do* rush upon destruction ! Oh ! Isabella, your prayers are vain !”

And with this comfortable reflection Mr. Willoughby went to give some necessary orders previous to his departure ; and in this diversion of his thoughts lost for some minutes the sense alike of his guilt and his wretchedness.

CHAP. XLII.

“ Fierce Repentance rears
Her snaky crest : a quick returning pang
Shoots through the conscious heart.”

THOMSON.

THE suspension was but momentary ; and, in hopes of some mitigation of his self-reproach, he sought Isabella. He found her in her nursery, apparently occupied wholly with her boy ; but in her face were such marks of mortal anguish as plainly shewed that her thoughts were not confined to that dear object of her care, whose returned

good looks, and joyous spirits, left no cause for pain or fear on his account.

Mr. Willoughby took him into his arms; caressed him; played with him; talked of his quick return to health, of the needless alarm that they had given themselves; “and so,” said he, “my dear Isabella will pass away all your fears. I will take as good care of myself as you will of our dear boy, and we shall meet to thank each other.”

Isabella was not obliged to reply to this; it was said in a moment when the child's attendant was not within hearing, and the next she was again in waiting to resume her charge when called upon. Mr. Willoughby putting the boy into her arms, invited Isabella to walk.

“You have not been in the air to day, my love,” said he; “let us go towards the water, I want to consult you about some trifling alterations;

the superintendence of the work will be an occupation, and an amusement for you in my absence."

Isabella prepared herself to comply; but with a passive sadness wholly unlike her usual alacrity, when called upon to share in any pursuits of Mr. Willoughby's.

She felt, indeed, such a dread of any renewal of a conversation like what had passed between them before that morning, that had she followed the impulse of her inclination, she would have avoided being again alone with Mr. Willoughby.

It was not, however, his intention to enter afresh upon the subject; but to act, as if having sufficiently re-assured her, there was no cause for uneasiness on her part; and that the few hours they were still to pass together might be passed in the unimportant, but familiar communication of a husband

and wife arranging to their mutual satisfaction any trifle that engaged their attention at the moment.

In this spirit, having drawn her arm under his, he walked with her through the wild paths and secluded spots which formed the *pleasure ground* of Eagle's Crag; commenting upon their beauties, pointing out the good taste of their former possessors, and suggesting such little emendations as a lapse of time had made desirable.

It was difficult for a mind as full of sorrow, and as devoid of hope as Isabella's was at this time, to attend to such discourse. Every word he uttered presented a future which she felt would never come; yet was she afraid to utter a syllable that might betray what she felt. She had failed in persuading him to that wholesome distrust of himself which would have led to safety; but to irritate him by

discovering her hopelessness that he would do right, could only have hastened and consummated the evil which she dreaded.

She could only repeat again and again, that she would attend to his directions ; that she would think of the alterations which he suggested ; would balance the alternatives that he left for her consideration, and agree with him that it would “ be pleasant to have some object in her walks ; that it would “ do her good to be much in the air,” and that “ a detail of how all went on would be a pleasant subject for their correspondence.” But so heavily did her mind weigh upon her bodily powers, that every step she took seemed ten ; she was rather supported by Mr. Willoughby, than held up by any exertion of her own ; and her feet dragged so slowly that at length Mr. Willoughby could not help saying,

“you seem tired; are you ill?” “No, not ill,” said Isabella, “but inactive; and if you have said all that you wish to say, I should be glad to go in, and lie down till dinner-time.”

“Oh, Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, “why will you thus destroy yourself? why will you doubt *me*, only to make yourself wretched?”

“Stay with me, or suffer me to go with you!” exclaimed Isabella, making what she thought her last effort, “and every doubt will vanish.”

“Why do you give such a test as you know I cannot comply with?” returned Mr. Willoughby. “Isabella, this is not like yourself, whom hitherto I have always found so reasonable, so persuadable.”

“Oh were it my own happiness alone that was at stake,” cried Isabella, “you would find me persuadable still! but I cannot consent, I cannot give

my sanction to what I know will be your ruin."

"Your suspicions are injurious to me, to more *than me*," said Mr. Willoughby, "and if you would not have me leave you in anger you must at least *conceal* them."

"I have done!" said Isabella; "let us go into the house."

As she said these words, she sunk from his arm, and must have fallen to the ground had he not caught her; and clasping her fondly to him, he exclaimed,

"My dearest creature, forgive my harshness! how could I be such a brute!"

"Never, never before," said Isabella, in an agony, "did you threaten me with your anger!"

"And never, never can you experience it!" cried he; "but I am a creature of imperfections; unworthy,

wholly unworthy, of being linked with such sweetness ; but, my dearest love, you have spoiled me ; such has been your indulgence to all my follies, that I cannot bear the shadow of injustice from you ; and indeed *now* you wrong me."

" You never shall have injustice from me," said Isabella, in a voice scarcely to be heard ; and as she said these words they entered the house.

Mr. Willoughby, seating Isabella, said everything that he could think of to compose her, or that could give her confidence in him ; and certainly, at the moment, he meant to be sincere ; and such was the appearance of his being so, that Isabella, in spite of her reason, felt something like hope revive in her heart : and she promising that she would do all that she could to be easy, he conducted her to the door

of her apartment and left her there, to take that repose of which she stood so much in want.

But repose visits not the wretched. Isabella could stretch her weary limbs upon the sopha, and press her throbbing head against its cushion, but the aching heart felt no relief.

“Leave you in anger!” were the only words that sounded in her ears: and that he was to leave her accompanied by her worst enemy, the only thought that remained on her mind.

In vain she attempted to reason herself into a less acute sense of what she was, and what she feared she must be. Unable to succeed, she gave way to a restlessness that would have made the softest down a bed of iron; and finding her present situation insupportable, she arose, and sought in active occupation to get more quickly through

a period, every passing moment of which she knew must be misery to her.

The exertion served but to increase the irritation of her spirits, and when she appeared at dinner her raised colour, and the ardent brilliancy of her eye, might have misled any but her present observers to have believed her not only happy, but joyous. But *they* could not be deceived. Her motion was hurried, her voice quick, her hands tremulous, and the palpitation of her bosom betrayed itself through the foldings of her garment.

Lady Charlotte looked at her, and wondered. Mr. Willoughby regarded her, and trembled.

By a manner the most quiet, by accents of the most even tone, by a gentle but not too marked attention, he strove to restore some degree of composure to the agitated frame of Isabella : nor was he wholly unsuccessful. The colour faded

from her cheek ; the eye lost its brightness ; and the voice resumed its usual sound. He carefully avoided any allusion to the separation that was to take place the next day ; and Lady Charlotte, who dreaded, from the state in which she saw Isabella, some sudden and violent explosion of her feelings, so skilfully aided the design of Mr. Willoughby, that the emotion of Isabella subsided by degrees ; and so settled a sadness took possession of her features, as bespoke a mind more disposed to suffer than to resent. Lady Charlotte could desire nothing better : it was the very degree and kind of misery that she could revel in, without fear of its excess recoiling upon herself : but it was not so with Mr. Willoughby.

Relieved from the apprehension of what might be the immediate effect of the disorder in which she had ap-

peared, his heart was but the more painfully oppressed by the settled grief for which it had been exchanged; and no longer dreading the consequences of any revulsion of feeling which his most undisguised interest in what affected her might occasion, he openly dedicated himself to her for the remainder of the evening. Under the appearance of necessary communication previous to his departure, he conversed almost exclusively with her; but yet, as before friends who would excuse a temporary neglect from the knowledge of the cause, he conversed in his usual pitch of voice, without mystery, or any apparent desire to be more private.

Under the same pretence, he put no interval between the withdrawal of the ladies from the dining-room and his rejoining them; but when he arose to open the door upon their retiring, he

said, "Come, I might as well go with you: we can't afford to lose half-hours now. Dunstan, you will join us when you choose." And so saying, he accompanied them into the library.

Isabella penetrated his motive for this little deviation from usual form. She felt that what he did was to shelter from a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Charlotte, and a grateful sense of so considerate a kindness brought tears of tenderness to her eyes. She could not forbear to press his hand, as if to thank him; and had they been alone, she might at this instant have acknowledged that her suspicions had wronged him.

By this kind of management the evening passed away with less pain and embarrassment than could have been hoped; and certainly not with less satisfaction to Isabella, from a restless kind of uneasiness apparent in Lady

Charlotte, which seemed to betray a fear that her victim might yet escape her.

True, however, to the plan which she had laid down for herself, Lady Charlotte, when the moment of separation for the night came, assumed all her wonted kindness and familiarity towards Isabella.

“My sweet friend, farewell! we must be early stirrers; but you must not arouse yourself from your downy couch, to attend at our breakfast; we will make our adieus now; and pray accept my thanks for all the pleasures that your stately castle has afforded us, and receive my best wishes, that it may ever be to you the abode of peace, of love, and happiness,—farewell!” said she, with an action as if she would have embraced Isabella. Isabella stepped back; “farewell!” said she, and then again approaching her, as she was her-

self about to quit the room; she said in an under voice, “take care! you may consummate my misery, but your own perdition will be the consequence!” and she passed on, without even casting an eye upon Lady Charlotte, to see what effect the denunciation had produced.

Nor would it have soothed the throbbing anxiety of her heart, or gratified a single feeling, had she seen the colourless lip, quivering with rage and fear; or witnessed the contracted hand, which seemed to mould itself into the form of immediate vengeance — she was gone! and Lady Charlotte had just so much self command left, as to enable her to smooth her features and to follow her, without having suffered the secret of the offence that she had received to escape her.

But Isabella had a much more severe farewell to make; she had willingly

consented not to leave her chamber until the travelling party should be gone; being convinced that she could not have witnessed the departure of Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte in the same carriage, without an emotion that must have betrayed the inmost recesses of her thoughts. In the hopes that she might a little veil also, even from Mr. Willoughby, a distress that she knew would be offensive to him, and for the manifestation of which he had threatened so severe a return, she was resolved not to arise from her bed; and she flattered herself that the wish which Mr. Willoughby must naturally be supposed to have not to provoke any outward marks of a grief which he was resolved not to remove, would facilitate her task of bidding him farewell with tolerable composure.

But Mr. Willoughby was on this occasion under the controul even of a

more powerful sensation than the desire of eluding temporary embarrassment. His whole soul was in tumults; torn at once by self-reproach, by a guilty passion, by the tenderest pity, and even by the purest love for the unfortunate Isabella, he strove to persuade himself that the step which he was about to take was necessary; that it led to no evil consequences; that it would enable him so to settle his pecuniary difficulties as to place it in his power to return to his home, to his child, and to his wife! and then, thought he, I will wholly break my connexion with Lady Charlotte, innocent as it is. I will settle here. We shall meet no more, and the mild virtues of my Isabella will efface the ravage that this insensate and cruel passion has made in my mind. It was his hope that he might leave Isabella under the conviction that such were his purposes, and that a very short time

would restore him to her, to remain with her for life ; and he thought that he could make this so plain, that he might have the consolation of leaving her in full reliance on his integrity, and in all the cheerfulness of hope.

But what had appeared so convincing to his own understanding, when he came to represent it to Isabella, struck him instantly as inadequate to impose upon hers. The weight of his argument lay in his resolution to abandon Lady Charlotte ; and this he could neither bring forward without acknowledging an interest between them, which he had so strenuously disavowed ; or if he could, was it possible for him to hope that Isabella would rely upon a justice in future which was denied to her at present ? He gave up then the hope of satisfying her reason, but he yielded to the indulgence of his present feelings by overwhelming her with the tenderest caresses.

Again and again he gave her the parting embrace, the parting kiss! reiterated his charge that she would write to him; that she would take care of herself. But all was uttered in monosyllables, or broken sentences. He talked not, as the day before, of alterations, of occupation, of amusement in his absence. There were no words but “Our boy!”—“Your precious health!”—“Do not doubt me!”—“Farewell!”—“I must be gone!”—“Not yet!”—“Not yet!”—And again and again a return from the already opened door.

The miserable Isabella could only utter, “Oh, Willoughby, you deceive yourself!”—“You go to ruin!”—“Oh! stay!”—“Yet, even yet, it is not too late!”—“Oh! take me with you!”—But the final farewell was at last pronounced, and he rushed hastily from the room, as if to deprive himself of the very power of return.

CHAP XLIII.

“ I have seen her sometimes in a calm
So desolate, that the most clamorous grief
Had nought to envy her within.”

BYRON

ISABELLA, exhausted, sunk motionless upon her pillow; and remained almost without consciousness, until the “ stealthy pace” of cautious respect approached her bed. It was Mrs. Evans with coffee in her hand.

“ I thought, madam, that you would want some breakfast; and perhaps you may fall asleep afterwards, having been disturbed so early.”

Isabella looked up on her humble friend ; and a consciousness that she was an object of compassion, and a sense of the kindness which pity had engendered, melted her into tears ; when she could speak, “ sit down Evans,” said she, “ and give me the coffee ; as you have brought it, I will try to take some.”

“ And perhaps eat a morsel of dry toast, madam,” said Evans.

“ Yes,” said Isabella, “ you make dry toast better than any body. I am sure you made this ; and I think I could never forbear to eat what you made. It is very good indeed !” said she, eating a small piece, and then, drinking a cup of coffee, “ Evans you are an excellent nurse ; draw my curtains, and I will try to sleep for half an hour ; but tell Williams to come to me the moment I ring.”

Isabella well knew that it was im-

possible she should sleep ; but she could not refuse to Evans the pleasure of believing that her good and kind management had had its full effect ; and she sent away the worthy creature with all the consolation which the lively interest she took in the sorrows of her young mistress so well deserved.

Isabella, however, found her bed insupportably irksome ; and being in some degree renovated by the refreshment that she had taken, she arose ; and feeling an almost invincible repugnance to undergoing the horrors of the solitary day that was before her, she waited not until she was dressed, before she wrote the following note to Mr. Parr.

“ I am again alone. Pray let me see you, and my dear Catherine. We shall not meet as we parted ; I cannot hope that your sagacity should be

at a loss for the cause ; but I know I may depend upon the rectitude of your feeling not to press for a confidence that could *tell* you nothing ; and which it would be unbecoming in me to make. Were there any thing to be done, whose advice would I seek sooner than yours ? but to suffer is a lesson I must learn from a higher source than that of any human intellect."

Mr. Parr and his daughter obeyed this melancholy summons, if not with pleasure, with the readiest promptitude. Mr. Parr was too well acquainted with the characters of those with whom Isabella had lately been compelled to associate, to have entertained a hope that her happiness would be augmented by such an exchange from her former solitude ; and, secluded even as he was from general intercourse, he had not escaped from

hearing such observations, or from such relation of facts, as had prepared him to find her really unhappy.

But he was not prepared for the ravages that the emotions of the two preceding days had made in her countenance; and he absolutely started when, upon entering the well-known library, he found her colourless as the garment in which she was wrapt; and saw that as she rose to receive him her whole frame trembled, and that the voice with which she would have greeted him, died inaudibly on her lips.

What a difference in her appearance from when last they met! she was then radiant with joy and hope: every pulse beating with the fond belief of being the cherished object of a husband's kindest affections!—now he saw her pale with sorrow; drooping under the conviction of the neglect, the unfaith-

fulness of that beloved husband, whom no coldness, no wrongs could dislodge from her heart.

The fervent Catherine ran to embrace her friend, and burst into tears as she cast her arms around her.

“ I do not wonder that you have suffered much from the alarm that the illness of your dear boy has occasioned you,” said Mr. Parr; “ but Hawkins assures me that he is quite well, and that there is no danger of a recurrence of the disorder.

Isabella pressed the hand of Mr. Parr, in token of her gratitude for so delicate a proof that he would understand nothing more of the nature of her sufferings, than what she could unreluctantly avow.

“ We must resume all our studies,” said Isabella, with a smile as faint as the sun beam of a December’s day. My dear Catherine, you will find me

I fear a sad truant ; while you, I dare say, have made a full use of the interval of our separation."

Mr. Parr and Catherine fell easily into the mode that Isabella seemed to mark out for their intercourse ; and without any reference to what might be supposed to have passed at Eagle's Crag since last they visited there, they re-commenced the occupations and amusements which had usually filled up their time before that interruption of their pursuits, which had ended with such a death blow to the happiness of Isabella.

But although she had thus endeavoured to ward off the destructive effects which she had so justly feared, both for her constitution and her intellects, if she had been left to solitude, and to the tyranny of her own thoughts ; she by no means hoped, or even intended, had it been possible, wholly to abstract herself from a sense

of the situation in which she was placed. She knew that at present she could only be passive; but she was not unaware that the time was probably not far distant, when she would be called upon to act.

During Mr. Willoughby's residence at Eagle's Crag she had communicated little with Lady Rachel; she had nothing to relate from which she had derived pleasure, or from which she could hope that Lady Rachel would receive a more favourable impression of Mr. Willoughby's character than what she usually professed to entertain. Her letters had therefore been short, and unfrequent; and she easily perceived by Lady Rachel's answers that she did not disapprove of this reserve, but reserve was now at an end. Mr. Willoughby had gone away with Lady Charlotte, and had left her in solitude and wretchedness.

What more could Isabella reveal of turpitude on his part, which he had not himself published to the world? But she was not without a hope that she might lighten the colours in which she knew he must appear to Lady Rachel, by relating the many acts of kindness, and expressions of affection, which he had so strangely mingled with his unshakable determination to desert her. She could also detail the little of reason which he had brought forward to justify such a step; and she endeavoured to persuade herself that Lady Rachel, from a more extended knowledge of his pecuniary difficulties than she had been able to extract from him, might find more weight in such arguments than she had done. She had besides to lay the whole of her own conduct, through the intricate path which she had been treading, before Lady Rachel; and, above all, it was through Lady Rachel alone that

she could expect to be truly informed of the real state of facts, and learn whether she had any thing to hope, or what more she had to suffer.

Urgent as were all the considerations that prompted her to write to Lady Rachel, yet Isabella was several days before she could sufficiently arrange her thoughts, or command her fingers steady enough to accomplish her purpose. She made frequent attempts; but the tone either of complaint or anger prevailed, as she thought, more than it ought, and she again postponed the letter till she could better satisfy herself with the feelings that she had to express.

At length she sent the following epistle to Lady Rachel :

“ I know, my ever honoured Lady Rachel, that you disdain the weakness which leads the affections to apologize for failings which the reason condemns ; but your candour withholds

you from giving judgment until the whole of the case is before you. You will not therefore be one of the censurers of my dear Mr. Willoughby, even for a conduct the publicity of which leaves no doubt of what he *has done*, until you can more fully understand *why* he has done it.

“ I am willing to persuade myself, that were I able to lay before you his reasons for neither remaining with me here, nor suffering me to go to town with him, they would be of sufficient weight to remove all imputation of wilful unkindness, or premeditated injury. But he has not thought it expedient to open himself to me on those difficulties in his pecuniary affairs, on which he grounded the manner of proceeding which must expose him to so much (I would fain hope) unjust censure. If the kindest expressions, and marks of the most sincere attachment, may be allowed as evidences of his

feelings, he did not quit me with less reluctance than I parted from him; and perhaps it is the weakness of my own mind that incapacitates me from feeling that confidence in his asseverations of love, and his professed purpose of a speedy return, not again to separate, which the solemnity and earnestness of them seem to demand: and I am the more inclined to believe this to be the case, because I have an *indubitable proof*, that a connexion, which I acknowledge reflects dishonour on both parties, has not been carried to the length that the indiscretion of their manners might give hasty judges reason to believe.

“ I have had my difficulties: and I must of course have many misgivings that I have not acted as well as I ought to have done. The most consoling test that I can think of is, the wish that I so earnestly feel, that you could have been witness to every word

and thought that this cruel subject has given rise to on my side.

“ You may, perhaps, be told, that it was offered, to break my solitude by the society of her whom I have the most reason to dread and to disapprove, of any human creature whatever. This is true : and although I can account to myself why I asked permission to refuse this offer, I doubt whether it may not appear to others, that it would have been more discreet to have sacrificed my feelings, and my dignity, to have separated two persons, although but for the shortest time, whom it is so much my interest to keep apart for ever.

“ I hope it is not an undue partiality to my own decision which leads me to believe that this will not be your opinion.

“ I had made my suspicions apparent ; I had even avowed them : what intercourse could have been maintain-

ed between us that would not have degraded me, and sanctioned the ill which I deprecated? I did not dare to do evil that good might come; could I even have hoped that so crooked a path would have led to good.

“ My guardianship having been refused where it was due, and where it might have been useful, I believed that all farther consideration was narrowed to the respect that I owed to myself.

“ I wished it to appear that I was not a dupe, lest my affected blindness should betray others into a security too likely to be not less injurious to them than to me: and it is most probable that had I determined otherwise, the disgrace on my part would have been incurred without producing the effect for which I had submitted to it. The husband's impatience to return to “ the haunts of men,” would at any

time have been a sufficient pretence for the wife's deserting the post which she affected to be willing to hold only in compassion to me.

“ Such were my reasons for what I did. It will be a consolation if they form towards you my apology.

“ Nor am I alone : Mr. Parr and his daughter are with me ; and from them I shall receive all the human support that I can want here. From the intelligence that you shall send me, my dear Lady Rachel, I look for that information which must regulate my future conduct ; and from your affection, all the assistance that can be given on this side heaven, to maintain me in the path which it shall be my duty to tread.

“ My boy has been alarmingly ill : he is now well ; and I am told that I need not fear for the future. Can you doubt but that on this subject my

heart is very sensible to joy and thankfulness? My dear, my ever honoured, my inexpressibly kind friend, farewell!"

The effort that Isabella had thus made to suppress nothing of the truth, while she kept back from the view of Lady Rachel the ravaging effects which such a state of things had had upon her mind, had in fact more disordered her frame, than if she had given a free vent to the sorrows that oppressed her. As she proceeded in her task, her head and heart seemed bursting with constrained passion, and when she had finished a detail which seemed the result of the calmest reason, and the most subdued feelings, she doubted whether her heart would not break, or her intellect desert her!

The soothings of the affectionate Catherine, who, alarmed by her longer than usual abstraction from her friends,

had come to seek her in her own apartment, made the tears flow, and gave her the relief which she so much wanted: and when the powers of reflection returned, she could confess to herself, that the sense of having been able to discharge so trying a duty with so much magnanimity towards others, and with so little advertence to self, was a blessing not to be purchased at too high a price. Such consciousness spread over her countenance a gentle beam of inward peace, that in part restored her features to their natural expression, and imparted a consolation to her two faithful friends, which the severe sympathy that her sorrows had wrought in their hearts made no more than necessary.

CHAP. XLIV.

“ We pray for all that Fortune can impart,
Yet in her smiles our surest ruin find ;
Grief is the fire that purifies the heart,
And frees from earthly dross th’ immortal mind.”

GALLY KNIGHT.

AND well it was, that the spirit had in its meekness so much strength, for every coming hour brought fresh assaults to prove it.

There wanted not real, although ill-judging friends ; nor yet light tatlers, who seemed emulous who should be foremost in revealing to Isabella the injuries that she was sustaining.

In the varied form of compassion, of advice, of inuendo, there was laid before her a scene of gambling the most ruinous; of the violation of obligations the most sacred; of the forgetfulness of duties the most imperative! She was stimulated by the sarcasm of derision, to remain no longer insensible and inactive; and she was exhorted to take her destiny into her own hand, and to escape with her boy from the destruction which it would not be in her power to avert. Such was particularly the language of her mother and sisters: not without a reproach from the former, that she was answerable for all that had ensued from her haughty rejection of Lady Charlotte for her companion in the absence of Mr. Willoughby.

“No body doubts the guilt of their connexion,” wrote Lady Jane; “but as she still remains with her husband,

she keeps her station in good company; why then fastidiously reject an arrangement which would have saved appearances to the world, and given Mr. Willoughby a motive for a speedy return into Westmorland? — a return which would have obviated the most calamitous part of this mischief—a course of play that can only end in his own ruin, and that of yourself and your child.”

There was not a fibre in the heart of Isabella responsive to such a note of worldly and unprincipled reasoning, and she felt it as an aggravation of the most heavy of her griefs that she should be obliged to hear it from a parent!

The taunts, the reproaches, the scriptural quotations, and the advices of Mrs. Nesbitt, none of which were spared upon this occasion, passed by

her as empty wind ; and to the grovelling and humiliating counsels of Lady Jane she opposed the more pure and lofty spirit of Lady Rachel, which supported her in an elevation of mind, as far removed from the meanness of pride as it was from the falsely calculating spirit which forgets, in the fleeting moments of time, the interests of eternity. By her precepts her eye had learnt to penetrate the dark clouds of mortality, and to fix its visions on the brightness of immortal bliss.

Of all the motives for consolation, or the suggestions for conduct that Isabella received from her real or affected friends at this disastrous period, Lady Rachel alone was able to communicate the one, or to direct the other.

Thus she wrote :

“ DEAREST CHILD,

“ Your afflictions are severe and piercing ; it is the will of God ! how you shall bear them must be your own. The responsibility is an awful one ; and it is as difficult to discharge, as it is awful. For the *one* right path, there are many wrong ones ; and they will present themselves to you under very seducing appearances, and with very high sounding names. Be it your part to reduce them to the nakedness of truth, and the simplicity of virtue.

“ There is nothing prudent, that is not true ; nor dignified that is not honest ; you have already acted upon this principle, and have thereby given a guarantee that no mistaken consideration for self, nor weak indulgence to others, shall ever betray you into a compromise with vice and folly. Bind yourself with bands of iron to that

main pillar of righteousness, ‘not to do evil that good may come.’ This once shaken, the whole fabric of virtue and religion is levelled with the ground, and is dispersed as the light particles of the sandy desert!

“ But, dearest child! I bless God that you stand more in need of consolation than of advice: it is sorrow, not sin that you have to grapple with. Keep the one afar from you, and the other *must* fade away into the fruition of everlasting happiness! You will say, and ‘*only* into everlasting happiness? have I nothing to hope on this side the grave?’ Far be it from me to encourage the rebellion of despair. Shall not he ‘who forms the light, and creates darkness,’ be able to say to the tormentors of this world, ‘Peace! be still!’ to take the sting from the serpent, and the poison from the adder? but come not forth on your journey

with the scanty provision that is dependent on the supplies that you may meet with in the way ; the manna *may* drop in the wilderness ; but the land of milk and honey is beyond the waters of Jordan.

“ Of your unhappy husband I can tell you nothing that you ought to hear. Yet I believe with you that he is more a dupe than a villain. His evil genius maintains her innocence stoutly ; and has even the effrontery to talk of her friendship for you, and of the sacrifices that she was willing to make for your sake. And she has her hearers, and her believers. Yet she disdains to disavow, almost to her husband’s face, the *holy* attachment that subsists between herself and the unhappy victim of her machinations. In all this there is neither the devotedness of love nor the headlong impulse of passion : there is in it more of the

cold calculation of malice than either; and malice is the ruling passion of her soul. Yet the infatuated Willoughby sees nothing but the most unspotted purity, and the most disinterested affection. The world, with very few exceptions, gives her credit for neither. Yet, as I have said, she has her partizans; and you have your censurers. Your friend Mrs. Nesbitt is the bitterest amongst them; for which, I doubt not, she can find scriptural authority.

“The guilty pair are almost constantly together; and at this moment you cannot throw yourself between them with any prospect but that of perishing in the act. He calls her ‘his guide,’ his ‘polar star;’ and he even dares to foretell the hour when you will own your obligations to her.

“You will believe that I had chased him from my presence, e’er he could

finish such a sentence, and that my doors are shut against them. Let not this concern you ; every drop of the polluted blood that circulates in his veins must be wrung out before he can be restored to a healthy state. It is by the knife and the caustic that he can alone be saved ; emollients and lenitives would be used in vain !

“ God support you until the final hour of trial, and *through* it ! It will not be long of coming ; there is plan and purpose even in what your enemy wishes to be considered only as the aberrations of vehement affection. It is not enough for her to rob you of your husband’s love, except she may involve you in her own disgrace ; nor is her passion so ungoverned as to carry her off with a ruined man, who cannot repay the sacrifices she makes him, even with the poor offering of his name and hand. Yet she is playing a despe-

rate game ; she will not be long able to retain her place in her husband's house ; already they live the lives of fiends ; and when once this last hold upon society is gone, she must either throw herself into the power of Wilmoughby, or return to her family ; and if ever she re-enter her father's doors, he will break all connexion between them, or he will break her heart. If it were not for that worldly, temporizing Lady Stanton, matters would have come to extremities before now.

“She soothes and flatters the tradesman Dunstan, who values the cajolerics of a Countess above his wife's chastity, and suffers himself to appear to be persuaded that there is nothing ‘but the ways of the world,’ and ‘the graces of fashionable life,’ in all that her worthy daughter does ; and there is no want of examples by which to uphold the doctrine. But although fashion,

like charity, may cover a multitude of sins, it cannot soften the asperities of temper; and the daughter does more in a quarter of an hour to deprive herself of her last asylum from the world's scorn, than the mother can accomplish in a week towards re-establishing her firmly in it.

“ Thus you see, my child, that all things tend to the catastrophe. Arouse every energy of your mind to abide the result. Whatever occurs, you and your dear boy shall never suffer the slightest pecuniary evil. I know how light you feel such apprehensions for yourself; and at this moment you advert, perhaps, but little to them even on his account; but the time will come when you will rejoice to feel that your child is not a beggar; and that your own merits have preserved him from being so.

“Your ardent young friend, Burghley, visits me often. His first visit seemed to be made with fear and trembling. I know I have an ill name amongst the feeble of soul, who cannot bear the sound of truth, but he is not one of those; and I have ‘so calmed the terrors of my claws,’ that he now runs in and out as if he were one of my household.

“I saw from the first that his motive for visiting me was kindness to you; and, without intending it, he disclosed so much of what had been passing at Eagle’s Crag, that I saw you, as although I had been there, in all your bright intelligence, enthroned above the cloudy atmosphere which lay at your feet. Preserve your pre-eminence I implore you! not merely that I may love you, as I never loved but one other human creature — that would

be a trifle — but that the excellence which is so cheering on earth may shine forth in glory inexpressible to all eternity! Child of my renovated affections, God bless you!”

Stimulating as was the view that Lady Rachel presented to the intellectual and moral feelings of Isabella, of the duties that she had to perform, and the high destiny to which she was called, it was insufficient to arrest the corroding tooth of sorrow which preyed too visibly on the health of its victim. The energies of the mind wore out the body, and not all the kind soothings of her two inestimable friends, nor the vigorous efforts with which she endeavoured to sustain herself, could much longer have supported her under the excruciating suspense, and the agonising irritation to which she was doomed. She prayed for some crisis; some consummation that

would cut off hope for ever, or restore her to an agency, where the misery, however overwhelming to herself, might be useful to the being whom she so ardently loved !

CHAP. XLV.

“ Away! I’ll teach your differences. Away! away!
If you will measure your lubber’s length,
Turn :—but away!—go to!—have you wisdom?
So! — ”

SHAKSPEARE.

A PERFECT confidence was at this time established between her and Mr. Parr; but it was the confidence of intuition. No circumstances had been required by Mr. Parr, nor had any been detailed by Isabella.

Mr. Parr had seen the heart, breaking under the weight of uncommuni-

cated sorrow ; and assuming the right, with the tenderness of a parent, had spoken and acted as although no reserve had been between them. Isabella felt that concealment was no longer possible, nor available to any good. It was a relief to have no part to act, no appearance to keep up. It was some consolation to weep in the presence of a friend ; or silently to put into his hand the letters which she received, while she withdrew to torture herself in solitude, by ruminating on their contents ; assured that on her return to society she should meet the eye of pity, and should hear the voice of wisdom and affection.

Yet a longer interval of solitude was at times necessary to her ; and it had become her habit to wander about some part of every morning by herself, while Mr. Parr was gone home for a few hours, and while Catherine, at the

request of her friend, found an occupation for herself.

At this part of the day her mind was less agitated than at any other; the irritation produced by the information brought by the post of the evening before was in some degree quieted, and the feverish expectation of what the next might produce was not risen to its highest point. In these rambles she would visit every place where she had ever been with Mr. Willoughby; and, strange as it may seem, the little building where she had overheard his conversation with Lady Charlotte, had for her a peculiar attraction. It is true that she never entered it without shuddering; but in her present circumstances there was a degree of balm in recalling to her mind the respect, the compassion, with which, even to her rival, he had spoken of her; in repeating to herself

the very words he had used ; in dwelling upon every syllable that told of his attachment to his boy, of his self-accusation, of his remorse, and even of his wretchedness. Well she knew that it was only through the gates of misery that he could return to the path of virtue ; and she sought to strengthen her mind to bear his sufferings, by the remembrance of how they had been incurred, and from what they were to redeem him.

It was now that the storm which had so long threatened seemed to be bursting over her head. Her last letters from town seemed to shut the door upon hope ; and Isabella had one morning withdrawn to her usual place of resort, with the dispiriting conviction that in all probability she should enter it no more.

Here, as she sat absorbed in the saddest of thoughts, the innermost

door of the little apartment opened, and Sir Charles Seymour stood before her!

She started from her seat, at so unexpected an apparition, but not from any apprehension for herself; she viewed him only as the messenger of ill tidings from her husband.

“ Oh! tell me, tell me all!” cried she. “ I am prepared for all!—I can bear all!—it will not kill me!” said she; and sunk almost lifeless on the seat from whence she had risen.

“ Most admirable, most injured of thy sex!” said Sir Charles. “ Would to God I had died, rather than had such a tale to tell! I need not appeal to you how zealously I have laboured to avert such a catastrophe; you have seen it; you have deigned, in the delicacy and wisdom of silence, I allow,—but you have deigned not to leave me ignorant that you approved

and that you thanked me for my friendship. For myself I could not ask for more; I did not deserve so much; for I have failed to preserve you! — Willoughby has consummated his folly! He has ruined himself, his child, — he has, — oh! blindness, infatuation beyond belief! — he has ruined *you*!

“Oh! my beloved creature,” cried he, as seating himself by her, he put one arm round her waist, as if to support her sinking frame, “in what other circumstances than the present should I dare to avow a passion that I had resolved to carry to my grave in silence and despair! but now, now, when you are alone in the world! unsupported! — abandoned! — beggared! shall I be restrained by mere forms, from offering you my protection! — from laying my fortune and my love at your feet! Oh! do not look so wildly, so angrily! — do not struggle

from the arm that shall be used only to defend you !”

“ Let me go ! — hold me not, basest of men !” cried the panting, struggling Isabella. “ I *will* be at liberty !” and with one effort she pushed him from her, and rushing to the door, she thought herself free ; but Sir Charles’s more powerful motion prevented her, and, interposing between her and the door,

“ My beloved creature,” said he, “ why this alarm ? By all that is sacred, you have no cause for apprehension. I am, I *must* be the creature of your will. But you *shall* hear me. Fondly as I doat upon you, as assuredly as all my hopes of future happiness hang on this moment, yet could you see my heart, you would see that I could disappoint this fondness, abjure these hopes, were it only a selfish good that I sought ; but it is *your* hap-

piness, your security, your redemption from sorrows as great as undeserved, that I have in view. Oh ! how deeply do I lament that these ends cannot be obtained by means more accordant to the delicacy of your wishes ! But yet hear me,—hear me with patience ;—hear me with that unprejudiced reason which is as much your distinction as your beauty or your virtue. If the most respectful, the purest, the most ardent affection can recommend me to your favour, you need not hesitate to grant it me. I ask you to be my wife. I ask you to suffer me to become the protector of your child, the restorer of his ruined fortunes. The ties that shall bind us to each other will be from the first sacred in the eyes of God ; they shall be made so in those of men from the first instant that by the absurd laws of this country it will be possible to make them so. Can the

circumstance of being born on one side or the other of an imaginary line, mislead your good sense to believe *that* to be *wrong* as an English woman which you would know to be *right* as a Scotch woman? The laws of that well-judging country would give you a legal redress for the injuries inflicted upon you; and you would then have only known me in the light which would have reflected so much honour upon me, as the warmest, the most devoted lover, and the truest friend, that ever woman had. And shall you be afraid to take your cause into your own hand? Shall words startle you? If I cannot now save your and your child from beggary and misery without some apparent wound to your delicacy, be assured that you cannot more deeply lament the necessity of that wound than I do myself. But are you in a situation to stand upon punctilio?

Am I to look coolly on and witness your destruction, lest I should shock a feeling founded alone in prejudice, and disavowed by reason? Allow me to accompany you, even this very hour, from this hated place. Everything is prepared for your evasion; and when I have once seen you in security, I will not again appear before you, until I can present to you a legal obligation which shall secure to your boy, if not an equivalent for what his father has so basely robbed him of, at least such a provision as will secure him a station in the world worthy of the mother from whence he sprung."

It was with repeated interruptions, with struggling, and resentment, that Isabella had been obliged to suffer Sir Charles to speak thus far; but at this moment, bursting from him, she cried, "stand off! must I hear such profanation? forbear! let me be gone!"

“*Never*, till you are calmer—*never* till you are in a state better to understand your own happiness,” said Sir Charles. “Lady Charlotte is with your husband. His only alternative to a jail, is banishment for the rest of his life from the country that gave him birth. And will you cling to such a man? As well might you refuse to quit the sinking vessel when the fury of the ocean pours over her. And must your boy share your destruction? and for what? a word? a name? Loveliest of creatures, see me thus lowly bent before you, in earnest supplication that you will save yourself, and bless me. I offer you rank—fortune. You despise them all. And well you may despise them: they are no purchase for merit such as yours. But I offer you a heart, which beats but for you, and which will cease to beat if you reject it, and in whose

devotion I dare aver that you will find happiness."

"In vain, in vain," cried Isabella, endeavouring to disengage her hands from his grasp, "do you attempt to move me; to hear you is a crime! let me go!" said she, stamping with her foot; or I will call for assistance, and expose you to all the obloquy and contempt that you deserve."

"Of what are you afraid?" cried he. "Your destiny is in your own hands. Only promise that you will reflect upon what I have said; that you will allow me again to see you. Tell me that you will pardon me the agitation I have caused you; that you do justice to the sincerity, the honesty of my offers, and I will let you go: for I am assured that in a calmer moment you will at least acquit me of any wilful offence."

"I will never pardon," said Isabella;

“I will promise nothing. And go, Sir, I *will*, in spite of you—this moment will I go.”

“Nor *this*, nor the *next*,” said he.
“I must not, I will not be baffled.”

The piercing shriek of Isabella, the bursting open of the door, and the appearance of Mr. Parr, were the events of a single moment. Equally simultaneous were Sir Charles's relaxed grasp of Isabella, and Mr. Parr's vigorous seizure of Sir Charles.

“Again have we met? And again is it my fate to chastise thy baseness?” exclaimed Mr. Parr. “Thank the principle that withholds me from striking thee to my foot, never to rise again. Go, thou betrayer of innocence! thou insulter of virtue, go! and hide thy infamy in some corner of the earth, where thy name shall never be heard more!”

And thus saying, and at the same time violently shaking the trembling culprit, with one powerful swing he flung him from him, accompanying the action with a spurn of his foot, which, although it touched not the person of Sir Charles, reached his pride, and caused him to turn back, foaming with rage, and vociferating vengeance.

“Approach not!” said Mr. Parr, raising with his strenuous arm the ponderous walking-stick which he held in his hand. “You *know* the vigor of this arm. Approach not, lest I forget every consideration, but the duty to inflict a punishment so justly your due, and fell you to the ground. Begone! and carry with you your disgraceful secret. I have before allowed you time for repentance, in vain as it seems. Abuse not my mercy a second time.”

“You shall hear from me; be as-

sured, you shall hear from me!" cried Sir Charles, in a voice almost choked with rage.

"In any form you please," returned Mr. Parr, with the utmost contempt. "But begone! — begone this instant! Away!" and he repeated the words, while he watched the retreating steps of Sir Charles till he could see him no more.

Then hastily turning round toward the miserable Isabella, he beheld her stretched senseless and breathless at his feet.

A gushing rivulet that fell into a basin at the door of the secluded place where they were, furnished him with the immediate means of recalling the apparent corpse to life; and, raising her gently in his arms, he laid her on the matted seat which half surrounded the room; then kneeling by her, "my dear

child," said he, "take courage; your audacious insulter is gone, never to return. You are safe. Be composed."

"Safe! Oh! what is my safety?" cried the grateful Isabella. "*You* are in danger, and in danger for *me*!"

"In danger!—in danger from such a reptile as *that*!" cried Mr. Parr. This arm could chastise an army of such guilt-shaken creatures! The slightest breath can quiver them! Waste not a thought upon the wretch. My will controls his fate. It has done so before time; it will ever do so; for well he knows I can tell a tale that would chase him from society with burning shame and infamy."

"Oh! who could have believed,—who could have thought there was such a man!" said Isabella.

"Think of him no more," said Mr.

Parr. "With whatever design he came here, it is frustrated. You will never see him more."

"He tells me," said Isabella, in accents scarcely articulate, "he tells me that I am undone; that treachery and guilt are consummated! Oh! why stayed I here?—why did I not rush between them? Had I perished in the attempt, what then?—I had perished in an act of duty."

"And your boy?" said Mr. Parr.

"My boy! my fatherless boy!" cried Isabella, in a tone of wild distraction, "O merciful God let me but preserve my senses! my boy! oh let him not be bereaved of both his parents in one hour! was not such a loss fatal to his father?"

"Then live for his sake," replied Mr. Parr; "desert not yourself, and God will not desert you."

"Oh, I have struggled, I have

wrestled with my calamities! but now !”

“ Now,” said Mr. Parr, “ is the time to struggle, to wrestle more; do not believe that you are hopeless; take not your fate from one habituated to falsehood; the moment for action is come; arouse yourself to act, and doubt not but you will be blessed.”

“ Oh, my more than parent!” said Isabella; “ but for you —

“ I am but the appointed agent,” said Mr. Parr; “ look higher, and your fears and doubts will fade away, like darkness before the rising sun. But your mortal part is exhausted. You must be conveyed to the house. I fear you cannot walk; and I am unwilling to leave you.”

“ Oh! leave me not!” said Isabella; “ perhaps my limbs may support me.” But the effort to rise overcame her, and she sunk back again on the matting.

Fortunately the anxious Catherine, who had sought her friend in every other place of her usual resort, appeared at this time at the door of the room, and furnished at once the means of communication, and the assistance necessary to transport Isabella to the house with ease and safety. Mr. Parr charged himself with the superintendence of the whole management, and took the principal part in its execution.

Under such kind guardianship Isabella was removed with so little exertion, that her exhausted frame did not suffer; and the happiness of finding herself once more under her own roof in safety, and surrounded by friends emulous who should most contribute to her ease and comfort, assisted so powerfully the efforts that she herself made to compose her distracted thoughts, that Mr. Parr had soon the

satisfaction of seeing her capable of receiving consolation, and of attending to reason. In this comparative repose we will leave her, to look after those who well deserved to “sleep no more.”

CHAP. XLVI.

“ I can give no reason, nor I will not,
More than a lodged hate, and certain loathing
I bear Antonia, that I follow thus
A losing suit against him.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE crisis that Lady Rachel had foretold had taken place. Mr. Dunstan and Lady Charlotte had separated. In vain were all the emollients applied by Lady Stanton: the asperities of Lady Charlotte's temper had made their way through them all.

Boastful of her self-called virtue, she disdained to disguise either her connexion with Mr. Willoughby, or the hatred and contempt with which she regarded her husband.

They met but to quarrel; they parted but to study new methods how best to provoke and irritate each other.

Mr. Dunstan was authoritative — Lady Charlotte insolent. Mr. Dunstan forbade her to receive Mr. Willoughby's visits: Lady Charlotte told Mr. Dunstan that the house was as much hers as his, and that she would receive whom she chose. Mr. Dunstan swore he would shut his doors against her. Lady Charlotte replied that she would sue him for a separate maintenance. Mr. Dunstan threatened her with a divorce: Lady Charlotte defied him. Mr. Dunstan locked her up in her apartment, and Lady Charlotte disappeared, taking with her her personal

attendant, and no track where she was gone could be traced.

It was at this period that the unhappy Willoughby, urged by the accumulating difficulties of his situation, had had recourse to the desperate expedient of the gaming-table, as the only immediate means in his power to free himself from the incessant harassing attendant upon every transaction of a necessitous man. The expedient had failed ; and he too had disappeared from the haunts of society. No one doubted but that they were together. But it was not so that Lady Charlotte meant to play her game.

The place of concealment to which Mr. Willoughby had withdrawn had been concerted with her ; and she had prepared it so apart from all his usual haunts, and so cut off from the knowledge of all with whom he had to do in every rank of life, that he was as

effectually concealed in the midst of the city of London as if he had been consigned to the grave.

Mr. Willoughby had no farther design in this seclusion than to gain time and leisure finally to determine how he should arrange his affairs, and then to quit the kingdom for ever.

In this moment of bitter reflection, the virtues of Isabella and the claims of his child seized upon his heart with irresistible force, and reduced the power of Lady Charlotte to the mild influence of a friend ; a dear, an inexpressibly dear friend : but such an one as he wished not to make partaker in his disgrace, or to be involved in his distress.

The anguish that he felt from a sense of the bitter sorrows that he knew he must have brought upon Isabella, was as a warning voice not to reduce Lady Charlotte to the same condi-

tion ; and the upbraidings of his conscience for what was past, goaded him to make all the reparation in his power, by assigning to his wife and child as ample a provision for the future as his limited means would allow ; and by leaving Lady Charlotte as fully as he could, in possession of that fair fame, which she so loudly asserted belonged by right to the pure and disinterested affection that subsisted between them. He had earnestly entreated her to remain under the protection of her husband, or to separate from him with the sanction of her friends, and to return to her father's house.

Nothing, however, could be farther from Lady Charlotte's intention than to take such salutary advice ; but it was her purpose to have continued with Mr. Dunstan until she could ascertain what power the knowledge of

Mr. Willoughby's ruin, and his supposed connexion with her, would give Sir Charles Seymour over the mind of Isabella. Judging of Isabella by herself, Lady Charlotte could scarcely limit this power to any degree short of so absolute a subjection of Isabella's resolutions to the tempting offers of protection and adoration which Sir Charles was so prepared to make her, as would ruin her reputation and destroy her peace of mind for ever. Lady Charlotte might then be the wife of Mr. Willoughby; and by persuading him to sell the whole of his landed property, a measure to which she was every day artfully leading him, they might still be in possession of means amply sufficient for any gratification of life in the foreign lands where they were henceforth to reside. Her triumph would thus be complete! and revenge and passion be alike satiated! Violence of temper had, howe-

ver, been too powerful for deliberate malice.

The explosion with Mr. Dunstan had been produced, not by any pre-meditated scheme on her part, but by one of those ungovernable gusts of fury that had so often counteracted the cooler enormities of Lady Charlotte, but which she also seldom failed to turn to her own advantage by her after-management.

No sooner did she find herself, by her own intemperance, excluded from her husband's house, and thrown under the unpitying observation of the world, than she resolved to seize that instant to accomplish her triumph over Isabella, and to consummate her revenge on the guilty Willoughby.

By closely concealing herself at the very period when Mr. Willoughby disappeared, she foresaw that it would be concluded that they were together;

and she calculated that Isabella's despair and indignation, on so decisive and so galling a proof of the injuries that were done her, would make her an easy prey to the arts of Sir Charles Seymour. To him alone she communicated the place of her retreat, and demanded to see him.

“ Now,” cried she, the instant he appeared, “ the moment of my triumph approaches! I deliver into your hands the destiny of Isabella Hastings! I have broken with my tyrant; — the world thinks me a disgraced fugitive at the mercy of her wretched husband. But I have taken effectual means to retain in my own hand the necessary proofs of his and my innocence, to be produced when such proofs will avail me; and these means I will not let go till I have attained the object of all my machinations. Do you your part. Disgrace my rival in the face of the world! —

burst asunder the ties that bind her to her husband ; and when his hand is again in his own power I shall not scruple to make it mine, by the very means which, if you are not a greater bungler than I take you for, you may make effectual to obtain possession of your deified darling.”

“ Doubt not my courage, my adroitness, or my success,” returned Sir Charles. “ I will die but I will obtain her ; you have heard me rave at her disdain, her cruelty ; you have heard me curse her infatuated attachment to her faithless husband ; you have heard me vow revenge ! but if I can once make her mine, her will shall be my law—her wish my religion ! by every oath that ever lover swore or broke, I mean honestly by her. I would that she could be mine without tasting disgrace by the way ; of dishonour she never can : the deed will be justified

by the necessity, and I do not despair but that I may convince her reason, and touch her heart."

"Win your laurels before you wear them!" said Lady Charlotte, with a smile of contempt, "and win them your own way. It is indifferent to me whether you convince her reason, touch her heart, or force her will; let her be disgraced; I care not whether she is dishonoured or not. My heart will never be at rest till I have brought down her proud humility, which made her despise me so meekly. Never can I make her suffer what she has made me endure! the sleepless nights, the restless days that I underwent, when first I saw myself supplanted by such a puppet! I can never forget, I will never forgive! I have sworn that I will never forgive Willoughby either; perhaps I never shall. My love may be transitory; I am sure my hate will

be immortal. At times I think I hate him even now. Most assuredly I often rejoice in his torture, and I exult in the misery that I have in store for him. Deeply is he in my debt, and many must be the hours of anguish that I must make him suffer before we are quits ! Oh, how I shall gloat over his distorted features when I tell him that his Isabella, his goddess of chastity, is in the arms of another ! How often has he dared to insult me with his idiot commendations of her purity, her virtue, her constancy to him ! He has had the presumption to tell me that she deserves better at his hands, than that any other woman should be preferred before her ! Yes, I have heard him say it ! and I did not stab him to the heart ! but the stab is coming ! my triumph will be full, and so shall my revenge be satisfied ; for yet, I cannot exist without him ! for him I forego all

the gauds of life ! I bind my fate to his broken fortunes ! with him I will quit my country, my station, *the all*, that once made life desirable ! oh this is madness ! but there is joy in being mad, which none but madmen know !”

“ And well do you deserve to know it,” said Sir Charles laughing ; “ for who so mad as you ? But is it possible that you really mean to starve with Willoughby in foreign lands ? with only half a reputation, and in possession of scarcely half a heart ? I know Willoughby well ; there is no answering madness in his character that can meet the glorious soarings which distinguish yours. *His* hate is not immortal ; and his soft spirit will be so shaken by remorse and sorrow, that he will have no whole heart to give.”

“ I charge you,” cried Lady Charlotte, vehemently, “ if you do not mean

to make me mad in earnest, not to hint the possibility that I am not sole and absolute monarch over the soul of Willoughby ; did I think otherways —— but I know I am ; and I will prove it by the uncontrolled power that I shall from this hour exercise over him ; Isabella's star is set, and I reign the sovereign luminary. The magic charm of her imaginary virtues, like the crystal castle in the fairy tales, has at times intervened between us, but you will dash it into atoms, and I shall enter in triumph.”

It will be but a starving triumph,” returned Sir Charles.

“ We shall not starve,” replied Lady Charlotte, “ although others may. I am the grand financier, as well as sovereign over the heart. There is yet enough to be saved from the wreck of his misused fortunes to make us affluent in those wiser countries where all

is given to individual gratification, and nothing to that of others. I am sick of the shews of life : of living to vanity rather than to pleasure. Henceforth *my* vanity shall be to be the happiest of my sex, in spite of all the musty moral-mongers in the world, with their formal saws of ‘ virtue is its own reward’—‘oh ! the sweet peace of conscience’—and thus prosing seek to cheat us of the sweetest moments of this life, by holding out the unknown joys of another. But leave me ; and let me next hear of you as the master of the fate of Isabella Hastings, or let me not hear of you again.”

“ That woman,” thought Sir Charles, as he withdrew, “ is a devil ! but she is a clever and a beauteous devil ! and, in spite of the injury that I am about to do him, I envy Willoughby almost as much as I pity him.”

It was under the influence of passions

only in a degree less diabolical than those which actuated Lady Charlotte, that Sir Charles repaired with all speed to the precincts of Eagle's Crag. There, in close concealment, he watched the habits of Isabella, and soon became acquainted with all her daily haunts. No time was to be lost ; and the morning of his so sudden and unexpected appearance all was in readiness to have carried her off with him, could he have determined her, by the first impulse of her grief and resentment, to have put herself under his protection ; or if this had not been the case, and had he seen any hope of future yielding, his purpose was openly to visit her, and to undermine her integrity by his sophistry : but when he found that she would not listen to him for one moment ; that her whole soul swelled with indignation and abhorrence, that she did not even fear him ;

and that by the mere vigor of her resolution, and the dignity of her virtue, she was about to escape from his hands, his senses became maddened, and every consideration of tenderness and pity gave way before the fear of losing his victim, and of returning unmasked, baffled, and despised, to encounter the scorn and fury of Lady Charlotte.

But the snarer was caught in his own toils, and the violence by which he thought to have secured his prize, was the very cause of that providential interposition of Mr. Parr, which drew on the disclosure, the disappointment, and the contempt that he so much dreaded.

CHAP. XLVII.

“ My shame and guilt confound me :

————— If heart's sorrow

Be a sufficient ransom for offence,

I tender 't here.”

SHAKESPEARE.

NOR did the consequence of his defeat rest with himself. Secure in his anticipated success, and eager to taste of those diabolical pleasures which she believed that she had prepared so securely for herself, Lady Charlotte ventured to unfold her part of the plot.

Since she had quitted her husband's

house, she had hitherto had no personal intercourse with Mr. Willoughby ; all their communication had been by letters ; but now, at whatever hazard, she was compelled to see him, if she would effectually convey the poison to his heart which was to be his destruction.

She resolved therefore to visit him ; and she appeared before him, unannounced, and unexpected. At the sight of a form, radiant at once with the most dazzling beauty, and the expression of the most ardent affection, the miserable Willoughby started from his reverie of despondency and self-condemnation, and flew to embrace his lovely friend ; exclaiming, “ this is kind ! ” but Lady Charlotte waved him off.

“ Willoughby,” she said, “ you see how much I dare for you. At this period, when all my hopes of fu-

ture happiness depend upon being able to prove that since I have left what the world in its wisdom pleases to call my lawful protector, we have been strangers so each other; I put all to hazard, to soften, since I cannot avert, your sufferings. But trespass not on my indulgence: remember we are *yet* no more than *friends*."

"Do me not the injustice to think," returned he, "that I am capable of abusing so much goodness: that in this my hour of degradation I can ever *wish* for more than friendship; but, in the gloom that surrounds me, your presence is as light and life: without your support, without your counsel, I am nothing. Do not despise me when I tell you that I have not had power; that I have not had *courage*, to make that communication which ought not to have been one moment delayed; and which, if it is

anticipated by malice, or by kindness, will brand me not only as the most imprudent, but as the most hard-hearted of human creatures."

"The communication," returned Lady Charlotte, "is become unnecessary."

"Unnecessary!" repeated Mr. Willoughby; "does she know that I have ruined her? that I have despoiled my boy of his inheritance?"

"Willoughby," replied Lady Charlotte, "look at me, and read in my face that which I have no power to tell."

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Willoughby; "is she dead? then what am I? what ought I to be?"

"She is not dead!" said Lady Charlotte.

"My son! my child! have I lost him? Oh well do I deserve such a stroke of chastisement!" said Mr. Willoughby.

“Your son lives—is well!” replied Lady Charlotte.

“What then is it that you have to tell me?” said the terrified Willoughby. “Surely my baseness has not driven reason from her seat? I have not quenched an intellect which illumined all it touched upon?”

“Too confiding Willoughby!” returned Lady Charlotte. “Are death and madness the only evils that can befall a wife? how has your confidence been abused?”

“My confidence abused!” cried Mr. Willoughby; “you cannot—dare not. The voice of calumny itself will not presume to breathe a whisper against her honour!”

“Willoughby,” said Lady Charlotte, “am I a calumniator? I never thought to have heard such words from you! but, at this moment, I can pardon your injustice. Mrs. Willoughby

has put herself under the protection of Sir Charles Seymour."

"It is impossible!" said Mr. Willoughby; "you have been imposed upon. I will stake my life on her purity—her virtue."

"They are not worth the hazard," replied Lady Charlotte; "but since you believe me wicked enough to invent, or fool enough to be imposed upon by such a falsehood, I have done; and may now leave you; until by some you can better trust you are awakened from your false security."

"Oh, leave me not!" said he; "forgive me: without the most damning proof I could not believe such a tale from the mouth of an angel."

"Then wait till you have such proof," said Lady Charlotte, with the bitterest scorn in her accent; "it will not be long first."

"Tell me, I conjure you, tell me,"

said he, “ from whom you heard this tale of impossible infamy : which but to credit for an instant would make virtue but a name, and truth a byeword of derision.”

“ Was Mrs. Willoughby,” said Lady Charlotte, “ the only immaculate? Were all purity, all honour confined to her bosom ; that if she fail, truth, honour, and virtue, must be extinct? I might have hoped that *you* had known at least *one* other woman better.”

“ If she be false,” returned Mr. Willoughby, “ no woman is true! There was a dignity in her purity ; a simplicity in her virtue ; a gentleness in her affection, that could not be counterfeit. My very *frown* would have killed her. In every action, word, and thought, there was a graceful decency, that threw such a sanctity

about her, as must have repulsed the most licentious, and awed the most audacious."

"Your frown would have killed her!" repeated Lady Charlotte, disdainfully; "she has out-lived your desertion. Dream on! — and awake not till the appalling voice of public scorn shall sound the note of degradation in your ears."

"You do not yourself believe the opprobrious story?" said Mr. Wiloughby, sternly.

"I would to God I did not!" said Lady Charlotte; "since you take it so much to heart. I did not think it would so much have touched you, or the evil should have told itself when it was felt; but I had flattered myself that, oppressive as it is, it would not have been without *one* consolation."

"Tell me upon what evidence you

believe it?" said Mr. Willoughby, "that my heart may be lightened from suspicion, or broken by grief."

"I could not have believed that the falsehood of a woman whom you never loved, could have broken your heart!" said Lady Charlotte.

"Whom I never loved!" repeated Mr. Willoughby; "Oh I have loved her! and I might never have loved another, had not ——" he suddenly stopped.

"I understand you," replied Lady Charlotte, "had not I intervened! I thank you for the reproach; but no! — cold hearted as you are, you never loved! you know not how to love. Love has a quicker sight; and had you loved, you might early have seen what might have saved you now from an incredulity worthy to be laughed at."

"What is it that you mean?" said

Mr. Willoughby; “what could I have seen?”

“That which I saw,” said Lady Charlotte; “and which I saw because I loved. The attack on the vanity; the yielding weakness; the capitulating indulgence; the established intercourse; the appointed rendezvous” —

“The appointed rendezvous!” broke in Mr. Willoughby, “you must not tell me so; there never was such a thing.”

“True, indeed, that I *must* not tell you so!” replied Lady Charlotte, “or I *could* have told you of the motive of the retreat into Westmorland; the meeting on the road ——”

“She told me herself,” interrupted Mr. Willoughby.

“No doubt,” replied Lady Charlotte; “but did she tell you of the private visitations? the *tête-à-tête* walks? the *holy* friendship that sub-

sisted between this votary of solitude, and her congenial soul?"

"It is calumny all!" replied Mr. Willoughby. "There is not a servant in her household that will not bear witness to the propriety, the exemplariness of her conduct."

"Have you consulted Adams on that point?" said Lady Charlotte, "her favourite attendant, whom she dismissed so suddenly. Did she ever assign a reason for such a dismissal?"

Mr. Willoughby changed countenance. "Do you know that Adams has ever dared to breathe a word against the faithfulness of my — my wife!" said he in a tone of the extremest anguish.

"Question *her*, and not me," said Lady Charlotte; "but whence had her seducer so intimate a knowledge of all the haunts around Eagle's Crag, which you mentioned to me yourself

with surprise, more than once or twice? Yet he acted the stranger well, when he so adroitly fastened himself upon you, on your so long delayed, and so little wished for return; but probably at the moment not unexpected, as might be guessed by the readiness and order in which, to your astonishment, you found every thing that could be wished or wanted. What think you of the mysterious tale of the red stag? the sudden departure when he had engaged to remain? What were her motives for driving from her house, in company of her husband, the very woman to whose charge she laid the neglect and the falsehood of that husband? But why do I recapitulate such by-gone follies? ask for your wife, and the voice of multitudes will tell you that she is with Sir Charles Seymour; that she has accepted his protection for herself, and her child; and that she justifies her conduct by

your desertion, and the ruin that you have brought on both."

The wretched Willoughby, now overcome by the effrontery and vehemence of the accusation, rather than by any weight of evidence that had been produced, uttered the groan of agony, and covering his face with his hands, sunk his head on the table before him.

"Willoughby, my dear Willoughby!" said the infernal Lady Charlotte, approaching him, and laying her hand with fondness on his shoulder, "for my sake do thus not desert yourself. Is there no drop of sweetness in the bitter cup? no after light breaking in upon you to dispel this present gloom?"

"I had hoped that the *rudest* bursting of your chains would not have taken from you all taste for liberty."

"Liberty!" cried he, "what liberty? would you have me give the woman

whom I have betrayed to scorn and ignominy? would you have me pursue with vengeance the victim of my own crime? Oh, she *was* innocent as lovely! the villain that has undone her was but the instrument in the hands of a greater villain than himself. *I* have been her seducer! *I* have been her betrayer! in the moment when my neglect, my cruelty, the ruin that I had brought on her, and on her child, had maddened her brain, *not* corrupted her heart! in that moment, when the very fiends would have melted with compassion, he, a tenfold devil, with unrelenting savageness has seized his prey; but I will chase him from the earth but I will have ample vengeance. Every drop of his corrupted blood will be but a poor atonement for the ruin of my poor, injured, unhappy Isabella! Yet what have I to do with vengeance? I, who am the

just mark of every thunderbolt of heaven. Leave me, leave me, lest I drag you also to destruction; leave me, I implore you."

"Never, my beloved!" said Lady Charlotte; "never will I leave you. Oh, do not thus abandon yourself, and all will yet be well."

"I have already abandoned myself," cried he, "too long abandoned all that made that self worthy of my care. Oh, where are the days of youth? the visions of virtue and of happiness that once enlightened my path? that one short twelvemonth past, I might have fixed for ever around me! fool! insensate! that could not see what would have made my bliss; what might have been my salvation!"

"And is this the return that love such as mine, is to meet with?" said Lady Charlotte. "Am I to be reproached? deserted? Oh Willoughby,

but that I can allow for every thing in this cruel moment, your words would rend my heart in twain ; you would indeed drag me to destruction ; for I will not, cannot live without you. I cannot survive the estrangement of your affection."

" Seek not to plunge me further into crime, I entreat you," said he. " Am I not cursed enough already ; here our intercourse must end. What remains for me of life must be spent in bitter anguish, remorse, and solitude. What could induce me to introduce you to such associates ? you have, I thank my God for it ! you have been a faithful guardian of your own honour : let me endeavour with tears of repentance to wash away the stains that are upon mine. If there remain for me one thought that is not misery, it must be that I have not your ruin to answer for ; and this thought will

bring you to my memory with more true and honest gratitude, than all the other obligations that I owe you."

"Let me then share your anguish, your remorse, your solitude;" cried Lady Charlotte, in the softest accents of love. "I may also have wherewith to reproach myself; penitence may become me as well as you; but I will expiate all my faults by an attachment, by a devotion to the object of my love, that the world never yet saw equalled."

"There was a time," replied the contrite Willoughby, "when words such as these would have sounded sweetly in my ears: but the delusion of passion is past, and truth interprets them in a sense that startles conscience, and enforces repentance."

"Am I awake?" cried Lady Charlotte. "Am I in my senses? Is it you who speak, and is it I who hear?"

Gracious God! that I should have lived to be reproached! to be rejected! to be preached to! to be moralized upon! but it cannot be? my Willoughby cannot be so altered? Oh, how bitterly have you regretted the barrier that was between us! How fondly have I anticipated the possibility that it might sometime be removed! how zealously have I preserved myself worthy of your regard! and now!—now that we might be happy: when all our past sufferings, all our past restraint might be done away, what puling, what morbid scruples, has your sickly brain engendered to destroy the fair fabric of happiness that ardent love and unrestrained freedom had combined to raise for us?"

"I have been a fool, and a dupe," replied Mr. Willoughby; "and I have wantonly trifled with the most solemn obligations of life: but I have never

denied, I have never doubted their authority. I cannot be a deliberate villain! the remainder of my days, were they to be stretched beyond the common date of mortality, would be too short to atone for the mischiefs that I have thoughtlessly done to individuals and to society:—mischief that I should but too probably have continued to do, had it not been for the awakening blow that has fallen upon me. The severe reckoning to which I am called for the injuries that I have inflicted on that innocent creature, so peculiarly trusted to my care, cannot be settled but by a life spent in endeavouring to repair the evils that I have done her. Henceforth it shall be my occupation to watch over her; to mitigate her sorrows; for deep will her sorrows be! to smooth the path to penitence and peace: and, although my eyes must never behold her more,

to exchange forgiveness ; and mingle mutual regrets. And blest shall I be, if, ere the grave closes over me, I may hope that I have in part retraced my erring steps, and expiated by the sincerity of my contrition, the evils that cannot be undone."

" Oh the head-long zeal of new conversion !" cried Lady Charlotte ; " if you ought to do so much for your betrayer, what is due to her who would have been your preserver ? For you, I have quitted rank and fortune ; soiled my reputation, and abandoned my friends ; for you I am become an out-cast from society ! cheap sacrifices all, if I could have secured your love, or soothed your sorrows ! and am I now to be turned adrift with a few moral sentences for my consolation ? Willoughby beware ! my soul is on fire : dread the explosion !"

" I never can forget the obligations

that I owe you," replied he; "I never can cease to remember the distinction with which you have honoured me; but ——"

"Mean spirited, cowardly Willoughby!" cried she, interrupting him; "thou hast dared to commit the crime, and fearest to reap the fruit of it! You have broken the lock, and dare not seize the treasure! 'The distinction with which I have honoured you!' and is it thus that thou namest a love such as mine? base and ungrateful! but farewell for ever! yet know that I triumph still! for thou art miserable, and I am revenged!"

And with these words she darted from the room, and left the astounded Willoughby the most wretched of human creatures.

And who shall pity him? Not she who has injured, but she whom he has injured would be his comforter; but

the hour of calm is not come: his wounds refuse to be healed; and in the desperation of his sorrow, he is reckless what he is, and what he shall become!

Yet in the direful variety of his distracted feelings, there was one master grief that held every other in check. Isabella! the victim of his indifference and his indiscretion! by him despoiled of fortune! of reputation! of virtue! the degraded mother of his child! Could he think of her, and reason not be driven from her seat? Could his heart feel for her injuries, and not break?

“It cannot last!” said the tortured Willoughby, and resigned himself to his sufferings!

CHAP. XLVIII.

"Gone to be married: gone to be friends!
False blood to false blood join'd!"

SHAKSPEARE.

BUT the resignation of Mr. Willoughby was despair; the resignation of Isabella was obedience: as the source, so was the stream. While the one lay groaning on the couch of agony, torn by remorse, racked by the unsatisfied wish for vengeance, tormented by the cruel thought that he was triumphed over by her whose offered

love had betrayed him to his worst of ills, and unable even to give his better purposes action; Isabella, meek, silent, submissive, looked only to the mercy of her Creator for some mitigation of her inflictions, and asked only for light how best to please him, and for power to perform the task he should assign her!

Nor did she long wait before she found herself called upon, not only to suffer but to act.

A week had elapsed from the day on which Sir Charles Seymour had been chased, with such deserved ignominy from the asylum of that virtue which he had sought to wound. A week of bitter sorrow and racking suspense to Isabella! and she was still uncertain of the fate that awaited her.

All the information that the most assiduous affection, or the researches of the most active curiosity had been

able to collect, amounted to no more than that Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby had both disappeared from the world, and that although no doubt was entertained of their being together, yet hitherto no trace had been found by the friends or enemies of either party, by which the place of retreat could be guessed at. It was conjectured that they were still in England; but that their final purpose was to escape to the Continent as soon as the vigilance and guard of Lady Charlotte's family should become less alive, than in these first hours of resentment and concern it could be.

Isabella was inclined to believe that this design was already accomplished; that the scene was already closed; and that she had nothing further to hope or to fear. What was to become of herself she was as little careful as he seemed to be to whose most solicitous

protection she had so sacred a claim. For her boy she still felt as a parent ; but she doubted not of the inviolability of Lady Rachel's promise, that she would protect and provide for him. In half-words she had repeatedly recommended him to the maternal care of Catherine, who but too well understood the inference that was to be drawn from such a transfer of duties, which had hitherto made the first pleasure of life to her afflicted friend. A speedy end to all her sufferings was indeed become the most earnest wish of the hopeless Isabella, and her enfeebled health seemed to promise its gratification. But no impatience attended this wish ; it was in the true spirit of filial obedience that she still said, "not my will, but thine be done."

"This was the state of Isabella's mind, when one evening she was aroused from the couch, on which the

tender care of her friends had induced her to repose, by being informed that Mr. Burghley was arrived at Eagle's Crag, and that he asked permission to see her. He had followed Roberts, to whom he had entrusted his message, so closely, that, sure of being welcome, Isabella had scarcely given her eager assent than he stood before her.

“Be not alarmed;—I come from Lady Rachel Roper. The moment is now arrived for which you have so long wished,—the moment when your interposition may save, may restore your husband.”

“Save him from what? from whom?” said Isabella.

“From himself! He has now no other enemy,” said Mr. Burghley. Then glancing his eye around, and becoming instantly scarlet as it rested for a moment on Catherine, “I am sure I speak before friends,” said he; “have

I not the honour to address myself to Mr. Parr?"

"And have not I the honour to recognize Mr. Burghley?" replied Mr. Parr. "But speak what you have to say. Mrs. Willoughby is in agonies till she can understand what has brought you here."

"The demolition of the baseless fabric of vice and treachery," returned Mr. Burghley. "My dearest Mrs. Willoughby look up. Your wrongs are revenged. Your virtues are acknowledged. Mr. Willoughby is no longer deceived. Lady Charlotte has eloped with Sir Charles Seymour."

"Merciful God!" cried Isabella, "can I only be saved by fresh crimes?"

"It is but the same net of wickedness that has been so long weaving to entrap you and our poor Willoughby," returned Mr. Burghley. "Let the workers be caught in the work of their

own hands ; and may it be as the poisoned garment of Hercules to them."

"Mrs. Willoughby seeks reconciliation, and not vengeance," said Mr. Parr. "Pray tell her what Lady Rachel wishes her to do."

"Lady Rachel wishes," replied Mr. Burghley, "that Mrs. Willoughby would immediately repair to town. She asks it of you, Sir, that you will be so kind as to accompany her ; and she requests the favour of this young lady," blushing again as he spoke, "who can only be Miss Parr, that she will undertake the superintendence of Mrs. Willoughby's little boy during his mother's absence."

"All and everything shall be done that Lady Rachel suggests," returned Mr. Parr. "My dear Mrs. Willoughby, this excellent friend of yours thinks of everything, and clears the road before you of every difficulty : but speak,

I entreat you ! let us hear your voice ! give vent to your full heart !”

And it was not without reason that Mr. Parr urged this request : for, pale and motionless, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, Isabella sat absorbed in the deepest thought ; or rather, without the power of thinking. So strange, so horrible, did she feel the facts to be that Mr. Burghley had announced ; and when, starting at the sound of Mr. Parr’s voice, she turned towards him, her look spoke so plainly the wandering of her mind, that Catherine, alarmed beyond every other consideration for the welfare of her friend, flew to her, and throwing her arms around her, “ My Isabella ! my friend !” cried she, “ oh, speak ! oh, speak ! I conjure you !”

“ There is strange wickedness in the world, Catherine !” said Isabella,

laying her hand calmly on that of her friend : “ but you are not wicked.”

And uttering an hysterical laugh, she fell back on the sofa.

All were presently in motion ; and Mrs. Evans being summoned to her lady, Isabella was soon conveyed to her own apartment, and put to bed ; Catherine taking her place by its side.

The two gentlemen being thus left alone, Mr. Burghley was at liberty to relate at full length all that had reached the public ear, relative to the strange turn that affairs had taken ; but there were gaps in the narrative which Mr. Parr felt that he could have filled up better than any one else, if he had thought proper to do so ; and there were others that could not be supplied by any conjecture that either he or Mr. Burghley could make. A revolution so extraordinary, and an

event so unlooked for, even by the parties most immediately concerned, could indeed be only accounted for by the uncertainty that must attend the course of those who embark on the sea of vice.

CHAP. XLIX.

“What will not revenge

Descend to? revenge at first thought sweet,

Bitter at length, back on itself recoils!”

MILTON.

* SIR Charles had returned with all the speed he could make from Westmorland to London, crest fallen, indignant, breathing vengeance, yet knowing in his heart that he should not dare to seek it; and most dreading to encounter the bitter taunts of Lady Charlotte, and wholly unprepared to mitigate the rage which he knew that

her disappointment would excite. Yet every moment of delay in communicating the failure of their plans must be a new offence to her, as being fraught with the danger of unveiling her real character to the remaining victim of her unrelenting vindictiveness. It was impossible that he could, face to face, undergo the humiliation of detailing his own shame, without some preparatory opening that might allow of time for the ebullition of her fiery passions a little to have spent itself before he exposed himself to its fury.

He wrote to her the following lines :

“ I have not succeeded ; but I owe my disappointment neither to any want of address in myself nor to the unyielding temper of the person with whom I had to do. Had we been left alone to deal the matter between ourselves, I should have now been writing to

you from Calais, and the happiest of men ; but in the very moment that I had seized my prey, there came down upon me the evil genius of my life, the gigantic Parr! who with one vigorous effort wrested the trembling lamb from the wolf, and with his sonorous voice so made the neighbouring mountains to resound, that if I had not fled from the place of combat, I had been thrown into the accursed lake that lies so conveniently at the bottom of them.

“ I hasten to give you this information the first moment I can ; as it may be necessary that you should change your proceedings, and not trust to the ground which has thus slipped from under your feet, and upon which you must not attempt to tread any further. I hope you have betrayed no consciousness of what you had so much reason to believe was so far advanced ; if so, as to you no great mischief is done.

I see but one game that you have to play. Fortune may yet stand your friend, and whether you change your name a little sooner or a little later, should be, to a woman of your comprehensive mind, a matter of little consequence. For myself, I shall keep snug ; and I have no fear that there will be more told than I wish to have revealed. There is a delicacy in that quarter resembling Cæsar's—and *attempt* there is considered almost as disgraceful as *success*, with less bigoted people. Withal, pray remember that I am at your disposal, and ready to confirm or deny, as far as a man of honour can, anything that you may see expedient to have confirmed or denied."

To this note he received in answer only these words: "Come to me instantly."

Sir Charles obeyed the summons

with fear and trembling; but the storm that he expected to have been poured on his head had taken another direction, and fell in all its violence on the devoted Willoughby.

It was no moment in which to reproach her ally for any failure of success, when by the precipitancy of her own disclosures, and the intemperance of her passions, she too had been driven from the field, baffled, despised, and rejected.

No sooner had Lady Charlotte retired from Mr. Willoughby's apartment to her own lurking place, than the conviction, that in the last words which she had uttered, she had laid open to him all the secrets of her soul, struck upon her understanding, and she felt that she was undone.

Yet too often had the weakness of her enemy replaced the sceptre in her hand, when by the want of self-go-

vernment she had suffered it to fall from her grasp, to give her reason wholly to despair of being able once more to resume her empire ; she hastened to repair the error if possible : her trusty emissary conveyed to Mr. Willoughby the following palinode :

“ I told you that you were miserable, and that I was revenged : I now tell you that I am miserable—good God, how miserable !—and that you are revenged. Dear object of my distracted heart, forgive me ! Too well thou knowest the violent workings of that heart ! but thou knowest also that it has not a pulse that beats not for thee ! how could you, my dearest, outrage its feelings by talking of ‘ obligation ?’—of the ‘ honour of my distinction ?’ Where has vanished our identity ? that *oneness* which those who love can so well understand, and which those who love

as I do, can so little bear to have doubted.

“ I do not disavow the feeling which your cruel *gratitude* excited ; but I do most earnestly renounce the violence with which it was expressed ; poor impotent rage ! which has turned in vengeance, as it was most right it should do, on myself ? Could you see my present state of desolation, even your cold heart might pity me. But why do I call you cold ? alas, you can feel but too acutely, and I honour you for the feelings which I have witnessed ; I share them with you. Suffer me, I beseech you, to sit by you—to watch you—to soothe you. As a *friend* I claim this privilege. If you would not have my life to answer for, send me one word of peace. Tell me that you forgive me ; say, ‘ dear Charlotte, come to me, and comfort me ! ’

“ You may make the most wretched of her sex the most happy. *You* may ; but no one else can. Will you refuse to do so ?”

Mr. Willoughby returned this answer :

“ I request, as the last favour I must ever receive at your hands, that we may henceforth be unknown to each other. I am unworthy of the love you profess for me. I can make no other return beyond the most ardent wishes for your well-being. The rest of my days is misery. But I would still fain believe that you will not rejoice in this misery ; that you will not triumph in the wide-extended ruin that has followed our unfortunate connexion.”

What became of Lady Charlotte, when she had read these words ? She saw herself unmasked ! She felt annihilated ! What was she ? What was

she to become? A fugitive wife! A dishonoured female! Dishonoured for the man who disdained her; who cast her off; who wished to see her no more! She was to bear the mark of shame, without having received the wages of iniquity. Yet was there one state more than any other bitter to her—all other evil appeared light when balanced with a return to her husband: to humble herself before him, to submit herself to the common duties of life, was worse than detection, abandonment, and ignominy. Yet how was she to avoid such a humiliation? She had no means of support independent of Mr. Dunstan, except by the assistance of her family; and to throw herself into their power was to make her husband the arbitrator of her fate.

Lady Charlotte was debating the direful alternative of starving or sub-

mission, when she received Sir Charles's note : and she could scarcely have rejoiced more in his success had she retained her power over Mr. Willoughby, than she did at his failure now she had lost it. Her quick apprehension caught in an instant all the circumstances of disgrace and danger with which Sir Charles was environed. She felt assured that nothing could be more acceptable to him than an immediate departure from England, in such circumstances, and in such company, as would put suspicion at fault, and confound persons and facts so effectually, as to make it almost impossible to come at the truth. With him she had no points of delicacy to manage ; he knew her thoroughly ; and a simple exposition of the state in which they both stood she had no doubt would produce from Sir Charles an offer to unite their interests and their fate.

Yet the sacrifice of pride, and all that yet remained to her of better feeling, was greater than what, in her first eagerness to escape from greater mortification, she had supposed possible. Confident as she felt when alone, yet the first moment that she met his eye, downcast and conscious of defeat as she beheld it, was to her a terrible one. Her whole frame shook with the violence and the variety of her passions. Her cheek was pale, her lips quivered, and her bosom heaved; and Sir Charles, prepared as he was for a scene of fury and of terror, yet stood confounded by symptoms of a disorder even greater than he had anticipated, and the nature of which he could not understand.

“ You are come,” said she, “ to tell me that Isabella has triumphed. This I could have believed possible : but I have to tell you that Willoughby has

also triumphed ; and this I could *no* have believed possible. But he has triumphed by his weakness, not by his strength. You knew the traitor better than I did, when you told me that in mere poorness of spirit he would sink under remorse and sorrow. So he has sunk : and at the instant when I looked to have seen his heart beat high with love and rapture, he became a preaching anchoret ! a whining penitent ! He thanked me for all favours passed,—wished me happy,—and bade me farewell, for ever ! Oh ! that at that moment I had stabbed him to the heart, and died in consummating my revenge !”

“ What is it that you tell me ?” cried Sir Charles, astonished almost beyond the power of understanding what he heard aright. “ Is it possible ! Have you and Willoughby parted, and for ever ?”

“For ever *shall* it be!” returned Lady Charlotte. “I hope you do not think so meanly of me, as to believe I could ever again look upon the man who has once rejected me?”

“But how, and why?” said Sir Charles.

“The soft-souled creature,” replied Lady Charlotte, “could not survive the dishonour of his precious wife.”

“Is it possible,” said Sir Charles, “that you could thus sell the skin before you had killed the bear.”

“Do not *you* reproach me,” said Lady Charlotte: “you who alone have made that false, which, had it been true, would have medicined every other evil. But look to yourself. No sooner will he know how anticipation outran the deed, than he will fall at the feet of his offended deity; implore her pardon; and the first offerings by

which she will be propitiated will be my disgrace and your immolation."

"Let us, then," cried Sir Charles, "join forces, and boldly stand upon our defence. All retreat seems to be cut off. Even the doors of your domestic tyrant would be hardly open to you. Defy him then at once; and since fate has not permitted me to be the protector of Isabella Willoughby, let it grant me the honour of protecting the lovely Charlotte, and I shall not repine."

"We treat upon fair and equal terms, it must be confessed," said Lady Charlotte. "Neither of us can mistake the motives of the other for the compact we are making; and if we should repent, we cannot complain of having been deceived. It is most certain that I will rather die a wanderer in the streets, than return under the roof of the man whom I despise

and detest, and to whom I so madly gave authority over me ; and you will find a Dunstan easier to deal with than a Willoughby."

" I fear neither of them," replied the valiant Sir Charles ; " but it would be cold wandering in the streets ; you had better be travelling in my carriage half over Europe ; and there are some passages in my life that I am too modest to wish should be brought under publick discussion, and which my ill success in Westmorland may help to bring to light. I shall not be sorry to put the worriers of reputation on a wrong scent. So that I do not see that we can do better than forget the disappointments we have received from others, by each doing all in their power to please the other."

" But my flight," said Lady Charlotte, " will furnish means to regain my liberty. You know my predilec-

tion for the married state : when I am free, will you marry me ? I yield upon no other terms."

"By this fair hand," said Sir Charles, kissing it, "and by the honour of a gentleman, I will."

"Enough," said Lady Charlotte. "Should we be tired of each other, I will not prove troublesome ; and where there can be no treachery there ought to be no resentment."

"We shall be the happiest of creatures," said Sir Charles, "where love is liberty, and nature law. Let us not delay to be so. I cannot be off too soon ; and you are not without your reasons for wishing yourself on the other side of the channel."

"Every hour, till I am out of the reach of my husband and my father, is an age," replied Lady Charlotte. "Your absence from town can scarcely have been marked by any one. It may

be supposed that we have been together ever since I left my prison. I shall be ready in an hour to accompany you to any sea port that you may think best."

The decision was soon made; and in less than forty-eight hours Sir Charles and Lady Charlotte were safely landed in France.

Such were the real circumstances of a tale that was told in as many ways as there were found persons to relate it; and which scandalized the serious, amazed the light minded, and surprised even the vicious; but which had the most powerful effects on the minds of Isabella and Mr. Willoughby.

CHAP. L.

" Oh, what can now console him."

GALLY KNIGHT.

WHEN Mr. Willoughby withdrew from the world, Lady Charlotte was alone acquainted with the place of his retreat. It had been provided for him by her means, and it was only through her agency that he had purposed to hold any communication beyond the walls that inclosed him.

It has been seen that this seclusion was designed to continue only until

Mr. Willoughby could so far overcome the impression which the first consciousness of the overwhelming ruin that he had brought upon himself, had made upon his mind, as to enable him to make those arrangements which would give him the power to offer the only amends that he had now to make to his injured wife and infant ; and to provide such a subsistence for himself, as would supply the necessaries and the decencies of life on some foreign shore.

He had not had sufficient command over himself to have made one step in so necessary a business, when the small remnant of peace and resolution, which the remorse for his own follies had left him, was borne down by the torrent of misery and self condemnation that Lady Charlotte poured upon him with so unrelenting a hand, in the treacherous falsehoods by which she stigmatized Isabella.

Previously determined not to swell the sum of his offences farther, by involving Lady Charlotte in his transgressions and his wretchedness, he entertained not a thought of making her the companion of his flight; yet his heart clung to her as a friend—as the only human being to whom he could look up for sympathy, or from whose mouth he could hope to hear the accents of affection; and it might have been, that pity for himself would alike have overcome his compassion for another, and his sense of rectitude, even had Lady Charlotte continued in her husband's house. But her rupture with Mr. Dunstan had turned his consideration for her reputation into a new channel. He now saw himself the only intervening guard between her and the fate which of all others she dreaded, the being at the mercy of a low minded and justly offended hus-

band ; and it would have been scarcely possible that he should have refused his protection to a woman who had, for his sake, deprived herself of every other support ; and who, if he abandoned her, would have no other shelter from the shivering evils of poverty and the furious blasts of calumny, but the gloomy mansion of an angry parent, or the humiliating restraint of a vindictive husband.

Perhaps no other being but herself could, in such circumstances, have broken the bands by which Mr. Willoughby would have felt himself bound to Lady Charlotte !

But the cruel exultation that she had betrayed in the supposed ignominy of the unfortunate Isabella, the violence of her reproaches, and the diabolical triumph of which she had boasted, in the accomplishment of his misery, and her own revenge, had ef-

fectually torn from his eyes the bandage with which the infatuation of his senses had blinded him ; and no sooner had the storm of conflicting passions, which the sense of the infamy that his own follies had brought on his unhappy wife, subsided, than his returning reason showed him the character of Lady Charlotte in its true light ; and though his self-love still clung to the chimera of the strength and faithfulness of her passion for him, yet was it mixed with so many debasing alloys, as justified to his feelings his determination to see her no more.

But in taking this resolution was there in the world a more forlorn and abandoned creature than the guilty Willoughby must have believed himself to be ?

Where were now the groups of friends who had so often surrounded his festive board ? where the wife

whose mild qualities left unchecked his pleasures abroad, and whose sweetness of temper and graciousness of manner secured him peace and cheerfulness at home? where that self-approving mind and fresh-springing hope which had gladdened his early years, and had spread a lustre over his opening manhood? — dispersed! betrayed! annihilated! and in their place solitude, bitter regret, deep remorse, and burning shame!

Cheated and triumphed over even by her who had seduced him from the most sacred of his duties by the most vehement professions of everlasting love, could he hope that there existed a human being who would look upon him with pity, or hold out a friendly hand to support him under his burthen, or to assist him in lightening it?

Yet there were still some sacred duties that bound him to life and to ex-

ertion : the duty of repairing, as far as possible, the injuries that he had done to his wife ; and that of securing protection for his infant son.

These duties could not be performed without some active effort on his part, and he was resolved to make it ; and then to bid adieu to society and the hopes of happiness together.

It was easy for him to make the place of his abode known to his servant Edwards ; and by his means to communicate with whomever he might judge the most proper to make his agent, to secure the two important objects that he had in view.

Rejecting each of his own particular friends, who, he might have flattered himself, would still be willing to serve him in so praiseworthy a purpose as he was now bent upon, he determined to apply to Lord Burghley, in the full confidence that in so

doing he fixed upon the person who would be the most acceptable to Isabella in the mediation that must take place between them; and in an unreserved reliance on the parental care that he would extend to his boy, while he made the separation that must now take place between the child and the mother, as little grievous to the latter as possible. In pursuance of these thoughts, he wrote the following letter to Lord Burghley :

“ MY LORD,

“ The most culpable of men would not have dared to address your Lordship, if he were not also the most penitent; or if he addressed you for any other purpose than to entreat that you will exert the high qualities that have so long secured you the respect of the wise and the good, in aiding him to repair, as far as it

is now reparable, the extensive evil that he has occasioned.

“That this miserable man feels only the tenderest compassion for the unfortunate woman who has been ruined by his follies, cannot, my Lord, give him any merit in your eyes. If he felt otherwise he would be a monster. But it may be an additional gratification to a disposition like yours, to be assured that, in saving the wife from utter destruction, you will mitigate the severest pangs of the guilty husband.

“If your Lordship should not hold this unhappy culprit wholly unworthy of your notice, the bearer will inform you where you may find the miserable

“F. WILLOUGHBY.”

The astonishment and confusion of thought which the perusal of this letter occasioned Lord Burghley, were beyond whatever he had before felt.

At the time when he received it he

was under the full persuasion that Mr. Willoughby had quitted the kingdom in company with Lady Charlotte; and of the malignant calumny which she had fabricated against Isabella he had not a shadow of knowledge or conception. So distant from the power of his imagination was the existence of such an imputation, that he had read Mr. Willoughby's letter three times before he could clearly comprehend to what husband, or to what wife, it alluded; but perfectly persuaded that it could not be in favour of Lady Charlotte that Mr. Willoughby would endeavour to interest him, his thoughts were at length irresistibly compelled to settle upon Isabella. That she was unfortunate, that she was injured, he too well knew, and feelingly deplored; but that she could be in any situation which could possibly make it a merit in her injurer to regard her with com-

passion, was beyond the power of his understanding to resolve. What “utter destruction threatened her,” the averting of which would “mitigate the severest pang of a guilty husband?” This could not be an evil which applied equally to his child and his wife, otherwise did Lord Burghley feel assured that he too would have been included in the earnest application made to him for his protection of the latter. Had then any individual misfortune fallen upon Isabella, independent of the distress and misery brought on both herself and her son by the indiscretion of her husband?

These were questions that he could not solve by any conjecture in his power to make. He sought their elucidation from Lady Jane Hastings; but he sought it in vain. Yet from her he received information that, while it contributed to add wonder to wonder,

and confusion to confusion, shed a ray of light on the dark fortunes of Isabella, which he was willing to believe might in time spring up to a perfect day.

From her he learned that the family of Lady Charlotte had been thrown into the greatest consternation and grief, by an express declaration from herself, that being no longer able to endure the tyranny and ill-usage of Mr. Dunstan, she had placed herself under the protection of Sir Charles Seymour, and had withdrawn to the Continent.

This new aspect of affairs more than ever inclined Lord Burghley to comply with Mr. Willoughby's request to make himself a party in all that might arise between him and Isabella; and he therefore lost no time in repairing to the place of Mr. Willoughby's concealment.

Mr. Willoughby received Lord Burghley with an assumed firmness of manner, and with the most profound respect, but with the air of a man who presumed nothing from their former acquaintance.

“Why this distance, Willoughby?” said the benevolent Lord Burghley: “Are we not friends?” And he put forth his hand with the most affectionate compassion.

“Oh! my Lord!” said the conscience-stricken Willoughby, and his heart rose to his throat; all his composure fled; and he turned hastily away to conceal his emotion.

“Willoughby,” said Lord Burghley, compose yourself. You have erred; you have recovered the right way: rely upon every effort in my power to smooth the ruggedness of the path, and to make it the road to peace and happiness.”

“My Lord,” replied Mr. Willoughby, with a broken voice and a trembling frame, “be assured, that for nothing that concerns such a wretch as myself should I have presumed to trouble you—but there is an interest—there is a human being—” His voice failed him, and he covered his face with his hands.

“You speak of your wife,” said Lord Burghley. “You speak of Isabella. You cannot do better than to speak of her, than to think of her as a preserving angel, who will bear you safely through all the dangers, all the sorrows, by which you are encompassed.”

Mr. Willoughby withdrew his hands from before his face, and, casting a look of wildness and indignation on Lord Burghley,

“You cannot,” said he, fiercely, mean to insult me?”

“There is some strange mistake

here," replied Lord Burghley. "But if you have been led to believe that your wife is less spotless than purity itself, you have been as grossly as wickedly deceived."

"Where is she?" said Mr. Willoughby, impatiently. "Where is she at this moment?"

"In her own house, in Westmorland," replied Lord Burghley, "watching over the welfare of your child, and struggling with the emotions of a heart that is breaking with its sorrows for your unhappiness."

"Oh! no, no!" cried Mr. Willoughby, with a tone of anguish that pierced the compassionate soul of Lord Burghley. "My Lord, *you* are deceived. She is—she is—do I live to speak it? and I the cause, the accursed cause!—she is with Sir Charles Seymour!" And at the same time, as if destroyed by the effort that he had

made to utter the detested name, he sunk back on his chair, and remained motionless.

“No ! on my life !” said Lord Burghley ; “ who can have imposed upon you so notorious a falsehood ? Is it possible that your seducer shall have become your tormentor ? and can you really be ignorant where Sir Charles is, and who is his companion ?”

“ I have already told you who is his companion, wherever he is,” said Mr. Willoughby ; “ urge me not to speak the name, lest my heart burst in ‘ the utterance.’”

“ Would to God,” said Lord Burghley, “ that all your sorrows were as imaginary as this ! Your wife is where you left her, and Sir Charles Seymour is at this hour in France with Lady Charlotte Dunstan.”

“ It is false !” said Mr. Willoughby, starting up. “ My Lord, I beg your

pardon ; but if you strike me for the word, I must say that it is false !”

“ And I would rather that you should strike *me*,” said Lord Burghley, calmly, than that it should not be true. “ My dear Willoughby, I now see that you have been most basely deceived ; most diabolically tormented ! With one vigorous effort shake off the chains that have so long bound you, and return to your most virtuous, most admirable wife ; she will be an Abigail to watch over your safety, not a Dalilah to seduce you to your ruin.”

“ It is not so ! it cannot be so !” said Mr. Willoughby, with a look of wildness. “ Oh Heavens ! what she who offered to share with me degradation and poverty ? she who for my sake abandoned rank, affluence, society, and reputation ? she who could refuse the man she loved, that which her honour forbade her to grant ! what *she* to

have given herself to another? and that other the paramour — oh no! no! seek not to impose impossibilities upon me. I know the violence of her temperament. I know that her passions may for a moment overcome the generosity of her nature; may make her mistake the agony of jealousy for the pleasure of revenge; but she is chaste! she is true!"

"Was she true," replied Lord Burghley, "when she poured into your ears the tale of infamy that blasted the fairest flower in virtue's garden? Was she chaste when she threw herself into the arms of Sir Charles Seymour, rather than return to the just subjection of her husband?"

"Am I then to believe this worse than hellish treachery? cried Mr. Willoughby, in a voice of stifled agony; and have I wronged my poor Isabella every way? but she is then spotless of

every stain? Oh God, for *this* I thank thee!"

"As the unsunned snow on Andes highest point!" said Lord Burghley, "be assured of it; nor is there less doubt of the depravity of her calumniators. I had my information from Lady Jane Hastings, who had read the letter which announced her flight."

"My Lord," said Mr. Willoughby, "I am unfit for company; I can transact no business now; I beg you to excuse me, if I say that I would be glad to be alone."

"No, Willoughby," replied Lord Burghley, "I shall not leave you. I came to serve you, and I cannot leave you until you have pointed out the way in which I can do so."

"You *cannot* save me," replied Mr. Willoughby; "you have plucked one poisoned arrow from my heart, but you have struck another there, which will rankle to my death."

“For shame, my friend!” cried Lord Burghley; “can the desertion of a bad woman thus unman you? How Sir Charles has supplanted you in her favour is a secret that I cannot penetrate; but I should rejoice to hear that it is rather that she has not been able to induce you to consummate your ruin and her own, than that her fickleness has disappointed a purpose that would have stamped an indelible opprobrium on your name.”

“On my honour, she has not disappointed any such purpose,” said Mr. Willoughby. “Lady Charlotte and I had parted, never to meet again, before I wrote to your Lordship. I hope that in *any* case I should not have been such a rascal as to have made her a partaker in the ruin that I have brought on myself; but from the moment that I was led to believe that my neglect had corrupted the purest

heart that ever beat in a human breast, I felt myself a wretch, to whose fate to bind that of any other, and that other, I own it with the blush of burning shame, the object of my love, would have been to heap coals of extinguishable fire on my head in this world and the next; and I solemnly assure you that when I wrote to you, I had not a wish, or a purpose, beyond reclaiming my injured Isabella, and providing for her and my child. I was *then*, and am *now*, reckless what becomes of myself. My future days must be spent in obscurity and remorse; and I pray God, that I may be able to support their endurance to any period, which he may in his justice see proper to prolong them."

"Brighter prospects open before you," said Lord Burghley. "The path of penitence ends in peace. Return to your wife, your child. The conse-

quences of former indiscretions may be mitigated. You have still no inconsiderable resources. Time may restore you to the station of life which for the present you have lost ; and, under the shadowing wings of virtuous love, obscurity itself will be the abode of happiness."

"No, my Lord," replied Mr. Willoughby, firmly ; "never more will I behold the excellence to whom I have have proved so unworthy a guardian. I know her virtues ! I feel her charms ! but henceforth I can only be the object of her duty, not of her affection. She married me without that preferring love which alone can throw a veil over the faults of humanity. After we were united, I took no pains, careless as I was ! to inspire her with this love. Whence now can it be generated ? She cannot even yield me the cold tribute of esteem and respect. I fear

no reproaches from her. I know that she will strictly do all that she ought to do; and one of her duties will be to warn her son not to resemble his father. I cannot live a scarecrow to my child! I cannot take to my bosom the wife in whose presence I shall feel humiliated. No! we must meet no more. But I will reduce myself to the narrowest pittance rather than she and her boy shall want any of the comforts or the accommodations of life, or that they should owe them to any other hand but mine. I am not yet so undone that my wife and child need be pensioners on the bounty of any one; and my own hands shall administer to the few wants that henceforth this worthless body can know, rather than that it should be so. But of this hereafter. I will leave her, who has the best right to it, that dear pledge of an union which, but for my

folly, might have been a most happy one. She will not refuse to let me sometimes look upon him. I shall not blast him with a look ; and every word I utter shall be a note of self-condemnation."

"I wonder not," said Lord Burghley, "that at this moment your recollections are so severe ; that your resolves are so desperate ; but you will resume a better spirit. You will feel that you are again unjust, to cast from you the woman whose happiness and whose dignity alike demand that she should be restored to the station of your associate and your wife."

"I cannot give her happiness," said Mr. Willoughby ; "she can derive no dignity from being associated with the man who has disgraced himself."

"She ought at least to be allowed to decide this question herself," replied

Lord Burghley. "I am confident that you will not refuse to see her."

"It is the single thing that I *will* refuse," said Mr. Willoughby. "Let her speak her wishes, her will; let her task me to the extent of my power; let her dictate to me the place of my abode, regulate the disposition of my time, point out all with whom I may converse; but let her not ask that we shall meet again; for this I *can not, will not* grant."

"Good God!" said Lord Burghley, "is it possible? can indeed that bad woman retain so much power over you?"

"She retains *no* power over me," said Mr. Willoughby, his frame shaking through every fibre; "from her, I am as free as air. I have not wronged her. But Isabella I *have* wronged, most cruelly wronged! beyond all forgiveness—beyond the hope that she

can do otherwise than despise me! Fool, dupe, as I have been! And if she would not have me expire with shame at her feet, let her not seek to see me. And now, I entreat that you will leave me. My senses are confounded, my heart is oppressed, beyond any farther endurance. This hour of darkness and of agony I must battle with alone! but I will overcome myself; you shall hear from me. I will live to do all the justice that I can now do to my wife and child; and when this is done, I would that it might be the will of God that this tortured heart would break!"

"My dear Willoughby!" said Lord Burghley.

"Pray, pray be gone! my brain turns round; I must be alone!"

Lord Burghley withdrew, but he earnestly entreated Edwards to watch

over his master with the most unre-mitted care, and to give the earliest notice of that degree of returning calmness from whence any hope could arise, that he might receive consolation and support from those who were so ready to afford them both to the fullest extent of their power.

Here then we must leave this wretched man to all the agonising reflections that the wrongs which he had done, and the treachery of which he had been the victim, were so well calculated to suggest, and look after gentler sorrows and less feculent affliction.

CHAP. LI.

“ He says he loves my daughter,
And I do think so too.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE result of Lord Burghley's report to Lady Rachel Roper of the absolute rupture which had taken place between Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte ; and the state of mind in which he had left the former, was that Mr. Burghley should immediately proceed to Eagle's Crag, and bring up Isabella under the guardianship of Mr. Parr ; as it appeared that it was

alone by her personal exertions, that there could be any hope of calming the mind of Mr. Willoughby, or of herself being restored to her rightful claims upon his heart, and his society. Ignorant as they were of Sir Charles's irruption upon Eagle's Crag, they could only impute the calumny which had wrought so different an effect to that which had been intended, to the bold falsehood of Lady Charlotte's unprincipled mind; and they knew not that she had rather anticipated what she believed would happen, than that she had asserted what she knew to be false; but the shade of difference which this distinction made in the actual untruth which she had uttered, made not any in the depravity of the character from whence it sprung; and so great did this depravity appear both to Lord Burghley and Lady Rachel, that in honour to human

nature, they mutually agreed to conceal, even from Isabella, the disgrace that had been reflected upon it.

Mr. Parr and Mr. Burghley had wearied themselves in attempting to unravel the web of wickedness that Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles Seymour had so artfully wrought into disentangible intricacy, when Catherine returned to tell them, that Isabella had fallen into a quiet sleep; and that she had hopes that she might be able to begin her journey to town the next morning. An early desire that no time should be lost in getting there, had become the ruling feeling of Isabella's mind, and Catherine had in consequence, at her request, already given the necessary orders. She was herself now ready to receive any that her father might have to give, on his so sudden and unlooked for departure from his own house.

“ I have only one direction to give my dear Catherine,” said he; “ it is, that you do not lose sight of the little precious Godfrey for one hour. If we do not preserve that valuable treasure for our dear Mrs. Willoughby, all our efforts to restore her to happiness will be fruitless. The rest I leave to your discretion.”

“ And *this*,” said Catherine, with a smile, “ you might have left to my heart.”

“ I know it, my dear child,” replied Mr. Parr, “ but then I should not have satisfied my own; but remember that all you do must be under the superintendence of Mrs. Evans, who will not only bring her heart to the charge, but her skill also.”

Catherine was now about to retire; when Mr. Burghley said, hesitating and colouring,

“ May we not ask one half hour’s

indulgence?—I have an apology to make, and I would rather make it in the presence of Mr. Parr, than at any other time.”

Catherine's natural lily, gave place to the most glowing rose.

“That blush, but too justly reproaches me,” continued Mr. Burghley. “I have once been guilty of impertinence to your daughter,” said he, turning to Mr. Parr; “and I am ready to submit to any penance that you may think proper to impose, except that of your forbidding me her acquaintance.”

“I know to what you allude,” said Mr. Parr, with his usual frankness; “Catherine and I have no secrets; and the next time you meet a rustic mountaineer botanizing, don't send her home to her father, with a report that she has met a wild man in her walks.”

Mr. Burghley laughed, and blushed: Catherine blushed also, but did not laugh.

“ I put myself into Miss Parr’s hands,” said Mr. Burghley. “ If I am wild in time to come, it will be her fault; for she may make me what she will.”

“ Then pray, Catherine,” said Mr. Parr, “ make him reasonable at this moment; and let him not offer any objection to your withdrawing to your own room. You want repose and quiet.”

Mr. Burghley instantly arose; and opening the door, “ Thus prompt shall you always find me to promote your welfare, although at my own expence,” said he, with a bow of arch solemnity and respect, that made the truth, which had burst unbidden from his heart, appear nothing beyond a playful gallantry.

Catherine's gracious smile, and obliging "good night, sir," completed her conquest; and as he closed the door after her, "I hope," said he, fervently, "that the time may come, when I shall be permitted to tell *you* sir, that my happiness depends upon the smiles of your daughter."

"The time is not *yet* come," said Mr. Parr, with a satisfaction at his heart, which spread itself over his countenance; "and therefore we will at present think no more about it."

But neither his look nor his tone struck any chill to the hopes of Mr. Burghley; indeed, so much was Mr. Parr prepossessed in Mr. Burghley's favour, from the partial estimation in which he knew that Isabella held him; and so much pleased had he been with all that had passed between them in the last few hours, that he could not forbear to indulge a hope, that in the

growing passion of this warm-hearted and generous-spirited young man, he should find an asylum for his Catherine, of which she so peculiarly stood in need ; and which he so much feared he might die without having secured to her.

Mutually pleased with each other, Mr. Parr and Mr. Burghley passed the remainder of the evening in discussing repeatedly all that either of them knew of the circumstances in which Mr. Willoughby stood, and in forming plans to restore him to happiness, and to re-instate him in affluence. But the knowledge of each was so limited, and they were so entirely without authority to act, that at this present period Mr. Parr could do nothing more towards promoting their wishes and their projects, than to make a communication to Mr. Roberts as fully as he could of the situation in which

Mr. Willoughby was placed ; and to request him to furnish him with any papers sealed up, that might be wanted, or useful to the settlement of Mr. Willoughby's affairs, which was about to take place.

The grieved and honest Roberts retired for the purpose of collecting such documents, and the next morning put into the hands of Mr. Parr a packet, which he informed him would greatly facilitate the settlement that was projected ; and respectfully requested that he might be favoured with any communication which might contribute to lessen the anxiety that he felt for the fate of his master, and for that of those whose happiness was so dependent upon his.

“ Oh, sir,” said this faithful creature, “ my lady is an angel ! and if my master will let her, she will make him the happiest and the best of men ; and

indeed, sir, there was a time when he was worthy of such a wife ; and I trust in God he will be so again ! and then I shall once more see around the fires of Eagle's Crag, the happy countenances that I have seen ; when, every evening, all who belonged to them prayed for their prosperity ; and every morning rose to bless them for that which they bestowed on others."

Mr. Parr cheered the worthy creature with assurances of the respect and esteem in which he was held by all who knew him ; and by encouraging the hopes which he had so gratefully expressed, of again seeing Eagle's Crag the abode of benevolence, love, and peace.

Isabella arose calm and sedate ; but with an evident guard on herself, that betrayed an apprehension that the least emotion would destroy her assumed fortitude. She cast one glance

on her boy ; but ventured not to take him into her arms : she spoke to Catherine only in monosyllables ; and replied to the attentions of her other friends only by a look, or a movement of the hand, or head.

Mr. Parr was charmed to see how Mr. Burghley's vivacity gave way before a solemnity so touching. Catherine herself could not have been more silent, less obtrusive, nor yet more attentive. Quietly he superintended every preparation for their departure ; and when all was ready he communicated the intelligence to Catherine in a whisper. Instructed by a motion from her, he advanced towards Isabella, and saying, " will you permit me to lead you to your carriage," he drew her arm under his ; he perceived that her limbs failed her, and he put his arm around her : Mr. Parr assisted to support her ; and Catherine gently

pressing one of her hands, and instantly letting it go again, disappeared through the opposite door to that from which Isabella was to depart.

Isabella spoke not : she did not dare to fix her eyes upon one well known object, or to raise them from the ground ; she passively suffered herself to be led to the carriage ; and, having entered it, in unbroken silence, Mr. Parr followed her, and she was driven away.

Mr. Burghley cast an eager look towards the windows of the house, in the flattering hope that he might have one more glance at Catherine, to whom he had given no small proof of his self-command, and his forgetfulness of his own gratification, that he had not made a single adieu.

He was rewarded for his forbearance by beholding her at a little door, that opened into the court, evidently

desirous to speak, and willing to be spoken to.

He flew to her, and seizing one of her hands, he exclaimed,

“ You have commands for me ; what would you have me do, or say, or think ? ”

“ I am ashamed,” said the modest and simple minded Catherine, “ to give you so much trouble : but I have thoughtlessly omitted to ask my father to give me one word from the inn where you are to sleep ; just to tell me how my dear Mrs. Willoughby has borne her journey, and how she supports herself. Will you be so kind as to make my request for me ? ”

“ May I not write that one word myself ? ” said Mr. Burghley.

“ Oh why should you take the trouble ? ” said Catherine. “ My father will be glad to write to me. ”

“ And shall *not* I ? ” said Mr.

Burghley, with a look of intelligence, that made the conscious Catherine blush.

“A single line will be sufficient.” replied she.

“Well,” returned Mr. Burghley, “niggard as you are in your favours, you shall see by the exactness with which I obey your orders, that I am worthy of being honoured with them a second time, when I hope they will be less restrained.”

“Thank you,” said Catherine, “and now pray go; for I would have you as near my dear Mrs. Willoughby as possible. She will want all her friends.”

“And she will have friends in all who are near her,” said Mr. Burghley; “but she cannot want me now; and I—I—I *want* to talk to you.”

“But I cannot stay,” said Catherine; “you heard my father charge

me never to lose sight of the little Godfrey, so God bless you." And she vanished in a moment ; and left him to mutter between his teeth, " the little tyrant ! " and to love her the better for the good natured reserve that she maintained.

On such slight incidents often depend the great events of human life, that the interview at the " little door " became an epoch in existence both to Mr. Burghley and Catherine ; and it will not be supposed that with all the real, and all the affected carelessness incident to young men, Mr. Burghley could forget to fulfil the commission he had received. He wrote the following lines from the appointed stage.

" *Our* dear Mrs. Willoughby has borne her little journey, and has supported herself through the day, as well as *our* dear Miss Parr could wish. How proud I am of the connecting

link which thus binds me at once to father and daughter ! but I dare not transgress my promised *one* line ; yet pray remember that *we*—these plurals are delicious !—are as much interested for your charge as you can be for ours ; and that we have a claim upon you for one word, if not for a whole line, to assure us of the welfare of little Godfrey. Your obedient slave, B.”

Catherine was charmed by Mr. Burghley’s gaiety ; and her good-will was engaged by the warmth of his affections ; but she was not drawn into a correspondence by his lover’s trick of pretended anxiety for her little charge.

When she wrote to her father, however, she sent him her acknowledgments for his exact compliance with her wishes ; and promised to find out, as soon as possible, some new office in which to employ him.

Thus was an intercourse established between them; and Catherine, without being aware from whence it sprung, had a new interest in life, which brightened every object, and enlivened every thought.

Mr. Burghley was indeed the lover of all others for Catherine. His gaiety exhilarated her; and rekindled in her breast the native spark of cheerfulness and mirth, which early sorrow and deep thought had nearly extinguished: and while his gentleness laid all precaution asleep, the ardency of his feelings found a correspondence in her own, which soon identified their sentiments, their wishes, and their hearts!

CHAP. LII.

" Then Zara knew the agony of shame
That bowed Alashtor ; and an icy chill
Shot to her heart, and quiver'd through her frame !"

GALLY KNIGHT.

AT this period nothing could be more fortunate for Catherine than that such a novel source of feeling should spring up. In this hour of sorrow all was gloomy around her.

The unusual solitude in which she was left ; the importance of the charge that was committed to her care ; the doubtful fate which hung over the

head of her friend ; all conspired to fill her mind with apprehension, and to depress her spirits ; but she thought of Mr. Burghley, and said to herself, “ these clouds will pass away.”

It is true that necessity for this consolation returned every minute ; hitherto she had received none from any other source.

Isabella had indeed arrived in town, without apparently having suffered in health by the exertion that she had made, or from the anxiety of her mind ; but here all of good was bounded.

No efforts that Lord Burghley could make were of any avail towards shaking Mr. Willoughby's resolution that he would see her no more.

Lady Rachel had received her with the fondest affection. She had wept over her faded form, and she had applauded the strength of her mind ; she had repeated her assurance that nei-

ther Isabella, nor her boy, should ever know deprivation; but she solemnly refused to assist in any way the unhappy Willoughby.

“*If,*” said she, “he *can* be restored to a healthy state of mind, it must be by the severity of the discipline that he is now undergoing. That the gangrene of vice has not wholly destroyed the moral principle, is proved by what he now endures. He can still feel; there is then still life: but I should hold myself as accessory to its final extinction, if I were to step in to abate him one pang of so salutary a suffering. If he have not strength in himself sufficient to make the sacrifices that his present condition requires, the saving him from them would be but bestowing an artificial life, that would last no longer than the first transitory emotion of pleasure on being so relieved. He must drink to the dregs

the bitter cup that he has mingled for himself; to the last drop he must drink it. His mind is not yet sufficiently subdued; his pride has not yielded. He applauds himself for the readiness with which he is willing to part with his last shilling for the support of his wife and child; he knows not that he more fears the humiliation of their being indebted to another hand for their maintenance, than that he shrinks from the inconveniences that they must suffer. He writhes under the lash of remorse, and mistakes his misery for penitence. But the penitent is humble; the penitent kisses the rod. But while he refuses to let the woman whom he has injured choose the reparation that he shall make her, he thinks more of escaping pain himself, than of alleviating that which he has inflicted upon her.

“ Be it your task, my dear child,”

said she to Isabella, “to mould this proud spirit, and this obstinate self-will, into the form of virtue. There are no sacrifices that can accomplish this transformation, that you are not called upon to make. *Your* pride, *your* self-will, must also be trodden under your feet. Self must be annihilated! The restoration of your husband to the path of virtue must be your sole aim. If, finally, this were only to be obtained by the renunciation of his society, the renunciation must be made. But it is not so, whatever he may now think or believe. He cannot be restored but by companionship with you. When he will consent that you shall together share the evil which he has brought upon you both, — when he shall seek by love, by tenderness, to heal the wounds that he has inflicted, then will he have re-instated you in all your rights; then will he have paid

the homage due to your virtues ;—and when he shall be willing, for your sake, to allow the hand of friendship to supply the defalcation which his vices have made in what is due from him to you, then, and not till then, will be proved that he is more ashamed of the vice, than afraid of the punishment. Then will he be penitent ; then will his reformation be accomplished ; he will be a new creature, and the blessings of renovation will be upon him.”

The understanding of Isabella acknowledged the sanative justice of Lady Rachel's decision ; but her feelings revolted from the severity of the discipline. She was uneasy even under the security from personal suffering that was promised ; to see her child in safety, and secure from the ills of unprotected poverty, was all the pecuniary good to which her apprehension was at this time sensible. For

herself to be less oppressed by distress than the object of her so ardent affection was henceforth to be, seemed to her an exemption, which robbed her of that identity with him, which, in this sad hour, could be her *one* and only worldly consolation.

Yet how dared she to breathe such thoughts before Lady Rachel?

She bowed before her, as the immediate agent of that Supreme Power, who punishes to reform, and chasteneth every son whom he receiveth!

“Oh! thou more than parent!” cried she, throwing herself on her knees before Lady Rachel, and hiding her face in her lap, “I acknowledge thy justice! thy goodness penetrates my heart! Forgive the feebleness of thy child, if she shrinks from thy stroke! Thy child! — may I promise to call myself so? I know the superiority of the virtues that I dare to emulate; but let

the implicitness of my obedience prove that in all I *can*, I am no unworthy successor of her whose place I aspire to fill !”

“ Oh ! my child, my child !” cried Lady Rachel, with a burst of passion that astonished, and almost annihilated Isabella, “ do I again embrace thee ? Oh ! beloved of my heart, thus let me fold thee to my bosom ! Dost thou, wilt thou, recognize me as thy mother ? Am I indeed no longer childless ? No, no ! My Rachel is restored to me ; thou dost not only emulate, but equal that angel which is in heaven. She was not tried as thou art ! Well dost thou fulfil those painful duties which she died because she was not permitted to perform. Oh ! may a merciful God support thee under them ! Yes,” continued she, still folding the amazed, the agitated Isabella, still closer to her bosom, “ thou shalt

take in my heart the place of a creature whom I loved, — blessed be God, not more than its Creator! for I could resign her to Him — I could rejoice that her eternity of bliss began, while I had yet to suffer all the sorrows of time; but yet a creature whom I loved with such intensity of passion, that no revolution of years ever has, ever *can*, lessen my regrets. But henceforth thou shalt fill the heart which she has left so vacant; not to efface her remembrance, but to be so blended with it, that Rachel and Isabella shall be one! But what am I about?” said Lady Rachel, resuming her steadier self; “I shall destroy by my ungoverned feelings my greatest earthly treasure. Your body is too feeble for your mind, my child! Rest your head on my bosom; pour your tears there. When I relax the reins of self-government, although but for a moment, my fiery

feelings scorch all around me ; your gentler soul melts into a softer sorrow, and injures none but yourself."

"Never, never," said the sobbing Isabella, "did you injure me!—never can you injure me! These tears are tears of transport! of gratitude to my God, who enables me to be a consolation to you ; it does me good to shed them."

"Receive this blessing then," said Lady Rachel, "as an earnest of a greater that is in store for you. You will be more than a *consolation* to the object of your dearest earthly love ; you will be a saviour to him."

Isabella pressed Lady Rachel's hand with an almost convulsive grasp. "Do you think so?" said she, with an emotion that almost choked her utterance.

"I *do*," replied Lady Rachel ; "but we must give him time. At present

we must suffer him to proceed in his own way. He has much to unlearn. Let the torrent flow till it has worked itself clear. It will be well, however, that he should be immediately informed of your arrival, and of your wish to see him. He will refuse your request ; but be not discouraged ; persist, and you will succeed."

" Oh ! could I save him, without augmenting his sufferings !" cried Isabella ; " to see him humiliated before me will be the bitterness of death !"

" And the raising him to hope and peace, as the joys of Paradise," said Lady Rachel. " Lord Burghley will endeavour to smooth the way for you. We must precipitate nothing."

Prudent as was this resolution, and well-grounded as Lady Rachel's hopes appeared, there seemed to be but too great a probability that both her pru-

dence and her foresight would be disappointed.

Mr. Willoughby, so far from yielding to an interview with Isabella, persisted in his resolution not again to see Lord Burghley; and there was less hope that he would be shaken in his resolution, as it seemed less to proceed from a disturbed imagination, than to be the deliberate determination of his understanding.

It was evident that he had regained the calmness of his mind, and the power of acting reasonably. Nothing could exceed the clearness, integrity, and openness with which he stated the demands that were upon him, and the means that yet remained to satisfy them, from the celerity with which he proceeded to bring all his intended arrangements to an issue, and from the unlimited and uncontrollable power with which he invested Lord Burghley to

act in future for his wife and child, without any reference to himself. Thus cutting off all necessity for a conference upon the subject, he proved the tenacity with which he adhered to his originally declared resolution, that having once fulfilled the only remaining obligation which bound him to any human creature, he would henceforth be self-banished from the society of mankind.

In vain was the request, the intreaty, that he would see Isabella, reiterated by repeated letters from Lord Burghley; in vain were her claims authoritatively urged by Lady Rachel; unsuccessfully did she herself resort to the humblest note of supplication; he was alike unmoved by all; and when Lord Burghley received the following letter, all hope seemed to be extinct, and the scene to be closed for ever.

“ MY LORD,

“ With this letter there will be delivered to you all the powers necessary to enable you to discharge, with as little inconvenience as the case will admit, the office that, with a kindness so undeserved on my part, you have consented to take upon yourself.

“ In making this final communication I entreat your patience, if I trespass something more on your time and attention than may strictly appear to be necessary to accomplish the purpose for which alone I should have presumed to have troubled you at all.

“ My Lord, in my so obstinate refusal to grant the only request that my unhappy wife has preferred, through the application of your Lordship, through that of Lady Rachel, and even through her own condescension, I may have appeared harsh, undutiful, and unkind. Nor do I know how to

acquit myself of these imputations otherways, than by a most solemn asseveration that it is a conscientious consideration for others, rather than any tenderness for my own feelings, that has rendered me deaf to the voice of friendship, of authority, and of duty.

“I can never more bestow happiness, nor reflect honour. I can never more be the worthy object of filial affection, nor of conjugal love. I know that I have sinned, not beyond the power of forgiveness, but beyond the boundary of affliction. Why then should I be seen by her, who cannot look upon me with pleasure? Why should I listen to accents whose every tone, be the words that were uttered what they might, must be the tone of reproach? What result of happiness could there be from an association which would narrow the accommodation of one party, or would expose both to the

humiliation of preying upon relationship for a supply? I know the nobleness of Lady Rachel's mind; and *misfortune* I might with gratitude have allowed her to repair: but never for me shall the current of her bounty be turned from its fertilizing course through the fields of virtue, to wash the barren strand of vice. She has reproached me with preferring to lessen the comforts of those for whose interests I affect to be so solicitous, to submitting myself to the humiliation of accepting the pecuniary aid which my vices have made necessary to their accommodation in life. The very reverse has been the principle upon which I have acted.

“In separating my interests from those of my wife and child, I have left the munificence of Lady Rachel to flow in its natural channel; and should the provision that I have en-

deavoured to make against the necessity of its reaching even those better parts of myself prove ineffectual, I shall rejoice that my inability is so well supplied, and shall not, I hope, be grudged the consolation of feeling that the worthless remnant does not interrupt any part of the stream.

“My Lord, you will be better able than I am myself to give weight and clearness to these confused thoughts: they are the workings of a disordered head, and an afflicted heart; but they are so bound up with the small remains of peace that I may still look to for myself, and are, in my opinion, so essential to the welfare of those who are inexpressibly dear to me, that I hope they will not be any farther controverted.

“It may be presumptuous to offer to one whom I have so justly offended, as I have done Lady Rachel Roper, an assurance of my undiminished duty,

and my everlasting gratitude ; but as this is the last time that I shall ever approach her, I intreat that she will pardon the liberty I take in making it. There is a still dearer object, to whom I dare not speak ; for what words could I utter that would not be an insult ? But permit me, my Lord, in bidding you a last farewell, to express the high esteem and regard, and never-ending gratitude, with which I shall ever remain your Lordship's much obliged and sincerely humble servant,

F. WILLOUGHBY."

Isabella read this letter, and hope died within her ; but in losing hope, she attained all the energy of despair.

" No, cruel Willoughby !" said she, " thou shalt not thus bereave me ! I *will* see thee ; and if thou wilt not let me live with thee, I will die at thy feet !"

Lady Rachel now felt her fears awakened for the consequences to Isabella of such an interview, and hesitated whether she should give way to a resolution from which so much evil might be dreaded, and from which so little good would probably ensue. But, acknowledging the sacredness of that duty which imposed upon Isabella *all* that could be done towards the preservation of her unhappy husband, she silenced her fears, and adhered to her principles.

But it was not easy to make even this last effort. Many difficulties intervened. Mr. Willoughby was now seen by no one but his own servant; and he was forbidden, under the severest effects of his master's displeasure, to admit any one to him without his express permission.

It was certain that this permission would not be obtained for Isabella

and Edwards, half in obedience to his master, and half in compassion for Isabella, whom he apprehended would scarcely survive witnessing the miserable state to which the object of her love was reduced, long resisted every means used to prevail with him to admit her against his master's prohibition. But at length, in part overawed, and in part persuaded, he yielded, and promised that she should find no impediment to entering Mr. Willoughby's apartment at any hour she should appoint.

There was no time to be lost. Edwards hourly expected that Mr. Willoughby would remove; and he was aware that he meant to do so with so much secrecy, that he should not himself have sufficient notice of the exact moment of his intended departure to give Isabella timely information when it would take place.

Vehemently as Isabella had desired, and earnestly as she had laboured to be admitted to her husband, now, when no farther obstacles were opposed to their meeting, her heart sunk, and she thought that she could have heard the sentence of her death with less trepidation than she learnt that whenever she chose she might once again look upon Mr. Willoughby.

Lady Rachel saw a confirmation of her own apprehensions in the quivering lips and death-like countenance of Isabella ; but looking beyond the earth on which they stood for the support which was equally wanted by each,

“ Go,” said she, “ my child ! go, in the strength of the Lord ! The issue is in his hands. It must be good !”

Isabella arose.

“ I *will* go !” said she. “ I will go under the banners which you have spread over me ; and if I perish, I perish !”

She was accompanied by a confidential female servant of Lady Rachel's; and Edwards was summoned to attend her chair, as the sudden stopping of a carriage at the door of Mr. Willoughby's obscure lodging might have attracted his notice, and awakened his suspicions.

When Isabella entered the narrow passage which led to the dark stairs that she was to ascend, her tremblings increased so much that it was not without the assistance of Edwards that she could reach the top; and as he opened the door of the darkened room, within whose confined space was the object that she so much longed, yet feared to see, she could have wished that the floor would have sunk under her feet.

“ Oh thou !” said she, “ who calmed the tumultuous sea with a word, speak, I beseech thee, to this beating heart of mine, and bid it be still !”

“ My master, madam,” whispered Edwards, “ is upon the sopha. Tread softly, and he will not see you till you are close to him.”

Edwards gently closed the door upon her ; and Isabella was the next moment by the side of her husband.

CHAP. LIIL.

“The treasures of the deep are not so precious
As the concealed comforts of a man
Lock'd up in woman's love.”

MIDDLETON.

“Who is there?” cried Mr. Willoughby, starting; “who are you?”

“Isabella! your wife! your friend!” cried she, and she cast herself upon her knees before him.

“Isabella? she whose virgin innocence I swore to guard from every approach of ill, and whom I left abandoned to all the evils of a wicked

world? Wife? that sacred name which comprehends all the decencies, all the chaste delights that can gladden existence, and whose duties I degraded to the gratification of my vanity, or the amusement of my lighter hours? Are these the elements from whence to form a friend? away! seek not to deceive me: *you cannot* be my friend!"

"By that innocence which was never sullied," said Isabella; "by that sacred name which in me has never been degraded; I dare claim the rights, the honours of a friend. Prove me! try me! I will not betray the one, nor be found unworthy of the other."

"And for whose sake will you do this?" said Mr. Willoughby, in a tone of bitterness.

"For, for ——" said Isabella, hesitatingly, and as if afraid to make a claim that would be disallowed, "for your sake."

“For mine? for such a wretch as I am? leave me! leave me! It cannot be! the thing is impossible!”

“Be it then for my duty’s sake,” said Isabella, meekly.

“Your duty!” cried the impatient Willoughby. “Shall I be the puppet of your duty? fondled by precept! and schooled by rule! It is not by such frigid application, that the racking pain of my head and heart can be assuaged; it is not by the languid touch of duty, that the sinking principle of life can be revived within me!”

“Then,” said Isabella, throwing herself into the arms of her husband; “then, be it rekindled by the sacred fire of love? I have loved you, my Willoughby; I have fondly loved you from the first days of our marriage: and however mortified vanity, or disappointed affection, may sometimes have put on a contrary appearance;

or a fear of being thought obtrusive, may have falsified the expression, I have never, never loved any other! even my wandering fancy has never seen a charm in any but yourself. I never can, I never shall love another; and I can never cease to love you! I ask not in return your love: *that* may be beyond your power to give; but I ask the privilege, not for your sake, but for my own, of suffering with you; of administering to your wishes! deign to accept of consolation and assistance from my hands.”

The stupid horror of despair, which, when first Isabella had approached her husband, had fixed every feature as by the immoveability of death, had, as her voice reached his ears, faded from his countenance: and as she uttered the last words, his eye darted a ray of intelligence, but it was the expression of impatience rather than of hope.

“What assistance? what consolation?” cried he, in a voice that thrilled through every fibre of her heart: and from *you!* you whom I have betrayed! ruined! And you say you love me! that you have always loved me! Good God! leave me: this instant leave me, if you would not see me do an act of tragic vengeance on myself, for all the wrongs that I have done to you.”

“I am not betrayed! I am not ruined!” said Isabella, in the softest tones of compassionate love. “I have lost nothing that was necessary to my happiness, but what you may restore: I may have been forgotten; but I have not been betrayed! In recalling me to your remembrance, think of me only as a friend: a friend that death alone can tear from you. No! never, never will I leave you! if you will not permit me to make you happy, we will be miserable together.”

“What? where? whom?” said Mr. Willoughby, with the quickness and confusion of a bewildered brain: “and will you indeed share ruin with me? will you abandon your native soil? your troops of friends! to hide your head in some foreign concealment with him who is not worthy of a friend? will you do this, as if the shame as well as the misery were yours?”

“With you,” returned Isabella, “I will share whatever the course of human events or the will of a Divine Providence may bring forth: but ruin, shame, and misery, I am not *now* called upon to share.

“Are you then come to seduce me with the benevolence of Lady Rachel?” returned Mr. Willoughby. “Having forfeited her esteem, would you have me contemptible enough to live upon her bounty?”

“No !” said Isabella, firmly ; “ never shall you hear from me a proposal that can wound your most delicate notions of dignity. But, my Beloved, we are not ruined : the portion which you have so nobly assigned to me and to our child is for us *all* a sufficiency competent to every comfort of life, and not wholly inadequate to some of its decorations : and shall we not partake of it together ? If greater affluence have been diminished by means which our better feelings condemn, the hour of shame, if ever there were such an hour, is passed. We have blushed for our weakness ; we may be allowed to rejoice in our strength. If our native soil have witnessed our imperfections, shall it be to foreigners alone that we shall manifest our virtues ? In living a life of reason and religion, on however contracted a scale, there can be no shame ; why not live such a life in the presence of our own people ?

Some loppings off must take place wherever we are : but where shall we find so many indemnifications for such excisions, as in our native land ? where the eye of kindness will still rest upon us, and the voice of friendship will still sound in our ears ; where every object by which we shall be surrounded may become an object of attachment, and every act of common expenditure may be a blessing to a compatriot. The only sacrifice that we are called to, is the sacrifice of our vanity, of our pride. Forgive me if I say, that in flying to another country, in hiding ourselves from our former associates, we do not abjure these idols ; we offer incense to them !”

“ What ! ” replied Mr. Willoughby, in a voice that appalled the feeling heart of Isabella, “ What ! would you have me an object for the finger of scorn to point at ! the jest of every witling that can tell how high I have

been ! how low I am fallen ! fallen by my own folly ! aye, there's the sting ! and dragged you, lovely, innocent, meritorious, as you are, into the same abyss ! Never ! never ! I ask not *you* to accompany me ; I am not so selfish ; but never shall my darker fortune shadow the land where my meridian sun has blazed."

"Nor do I ask that they should," replied Isabella, to whom the word *selfish* had conveyed a sensation of happiness, long unknown to her feelings. "It is the meridian sun, which is now about to break forth. All that has gone before was shade. What you will henceforth do, will court observation ; what is past, as it was transacted in darkness, may well rest in obscurity. The blush and down-cast eye may attend the consciousness of error, but the erect mien and untroubled countenance belong to the

abjuration of it. To have fallen from the slippery eminence on which we were placed, betrays no extraordinary heedlessness ; but to arise uncontaminated, to replace ourselves on the firm platform of reason and moderation, shews a strength which, if it furnish no grounds for pride, manifests a self-control that may well challenge the respect of others. You and I, my Willoughby, have been identified in the face of God and man ; let us not be separated. In your sickness and your sorrow I have a right to my part. Oh bereave me not of what is dearer to me than health and joy, apart from you. You have always sought to give me happiness by indulgence and generosity ; withdraw them not at a moment when they may establish a happiness dearer, ten thousand times dearer, to me than my own."

The wondering, the doubting, and

at length the ardently delighted eye of Mr. Willoughby, was now fixed intently on the features of Isabella.

He clasped his hands together. "Oh Isabella! is it possible? Have I been thus beloved? am I still thus beloved? beloved with a strength of feeling that has resisted coldness, neglect, unfaithfulness! that no offence could alienate! no fear of poverty chill! Oh! how shall I expiate my folly, my blindness, my ingratitude!"

"All is expiated," said Isabella; "all is forgotten; from this hour we understand each other, and can have but one soul between us."

"If this be a dream," exclaimed Mr. Willoughby, "Oh may I never awake! Gentlest most generous, most unresenting of human creatures," cried he, pressing her fondly to his heart, "thou hast conquered! I yield myself to thy guidance; my proud heart

might have withstood the discipline of duty, but has no defence against the control of love."

"Oh misery!" cried Isabella, "thou mayst be borne! but bliss like this is too great for mortality!"

"My Isabella! My love!" cried Mr. Willoughby, "look up! revive! let not my return to virtue and to thee be more fatal than my wanderings have been."

"No, dearest Willoughby," said the reviving Isabella, "we shall not part; I shall live to bless you, and to be blessed by you."

"Good God!" said Mr. Willoughby, "but I will not pain you by any retrospection; even to ease my bursting heart, which yearns to confess all its offences towards you."

"Your *heart* never offended me," said Isabella. "I *know* it always did

me justice ; but let us not look back : our way is onward."

" Oh what a difference ! " said Mr. Willoughby ; " this is love ! How could I mistake the *ignis fatuus* which misled me, for the holy flame of real love ? "

" No more, my dear Willoughby ; no more, I beg, " said Isabella ; " is it not enough that the day-spring is returned, and every thing is now seen in its true light ? "

" But how besotted must have been the senses that could revel in such a night of darkness as I have been lost in ! " said Mr. Willoughby.

" Willoughby ! " said Isabella, " at once to end all allusions to this painful subject, learn that you have no confessions to make me. I know alike your aberrations, and the extent of them."

" Isabella, " said Mr. Willoughby,

“ what do you mean? what is it that you know?”

“ I was witness,” said Isabella;—and as she spoke every drop of her blood retreated to her heart, and she became cold as marble;—“ I was witness to what passed in the little temple in the wood.”

“ And do you still say that you do not despise, hate, and abhor me?” cried he, vehemently.

“ I pitied you then,” said Isabella; “ I prayed for you: my prayers have been heard, and now—I exult in you.”

“ Oh what a crowd of torturing recollections have you brought to my mind!” exclaimed Mr. Willoughby. “ What must I have made you suffer! and at such a moment too! our dear boy! and yet you so meek! so kind! in the midst of all your own agonies so fearful of giving me pain;—me whom you knew

to be a villain! a dissembling, a betraying villain!"

"No, no!" cried Isabella, "I never thought of you in such a light; for pity's sake do not harrow both your feelings and my own, by such groundless apprehensions. I saw the delusion under which you acted; and trusted that you, too, *would* see it; and that all would be well."

"And then," said Mr. Willoughby, pursuing the train of his own thoughts, "the calm dignity of demeanour; the mild, but steady adherence to what was right; the urgent entreaty that I would save *myself*; the meek submission to inevitable evil; Oh virtue, how uniform are all thy shapings! and this was the jewel that I flung from me! and for what? Oh lovely, and beloved! thou mayst forgive me; but never shall I forgive myself!"

"Yes for *my sake*, you will," said

Isabella ; “ henceforth we must have no individual feelings ; you will not harbour resentment against my best, my dearest friend.”

“ In all ways you overcome me,” said Mr. Willoughby. “ But my dearest, how will you teach me to bear with patience *your* sufferance of the ills attendant on that deprivation, which I have imposed upon you ? How shall I learn to see *your* child despoiled of the inheritance of his fathers, and not hate the author of such cruelty ?”

“ By giving me more than I have lost,” said Isabella ; “ by leaving to our child a better inheritance than that of which he has been deprived. What are buildings and acres ? the changing possessions of successive owners. But the fruits of temperance and moderation ; of self-government and integrity ; of a christian’s hope

and a christian's faith, are eternal! These you will convey to your son, by precept and example; you have received them from your parents, and they have outlived all that they left you besides; and living they will support you and him; and dying they will bless you both."

"Who would dare to be a coward under such a commander?" cried Mr. Willoughby. "Oh wonderful Isabella! where learnt you this lofty strain of thought? this power to shake off all mortal evil; and thus to soar to heaven, while on earth?"

"In the school of adversity," replied Isabella, humbly: "I am not afraid to tell you so. I have seen the moment when your love was nothing to me, in comparison with your integrity; I have passed through a period, when all the riches of the universe would not have stilled one agonizing

throb; it was as the passage of death, with eternity opening upon me! and shall I have felt and seen this, and can the impression be other-ways than indelible? Can there be an instant in my life to come, when the glories of eternity shall not make pale the brightest of all earthly joys?"

"My instructress, my guardian angel, my wife! Oh blessed name!" exclaimed the enraptured Willoughby; "take me to you, and make me all I ought to be!"

"Oh, Willoughby," said Isabella; "you have a more celestial guardian, a wiser instructor than I can be; but all that the affection of a wife can do, I dare affirm, that you shall receive from me. But our minds are too high set; you tremble; I am exhausted: and yet—how shall we part?"

"You shall not part," said the voice of Lady Rachel, as she entered the

room. "Forgive me this intrusion; my anxiety, my fears, have brought me here. I trembled for this dear child, I trembled for you also, Willoughby, the two dearest possessions that I have now on earth. Encouraged by your lengthened conference to hope that the virtues of the one had prevailed over the imperfections of the other, I have ventured to approach you, and I ask no other proof that all is as I wish it, than my Isabella's last words — you are again united, and the asylum that has been granted to the wife, shall no longer be denied to the husband."

At these words of Lady Rachel's, Isabella cast herself into her arms in a transport of gratitude; and the humbled Willoughby bent his knee before her. She tenderly embraced them both.

"My children," said she, "you

have nearly destroyed each other; calm yourselves; let us leave this place of gloom and sorrow: brighter scenes, and happier prospects attend you in my house. My carriage waits at a little distance; let it be called; and let us depart together."

It was a relief to Mr. Willoughby, to go himself to give orders for this purpose; and Isabella hiding her face in Lady Rachel's bosom, gave way to a gush of tears.

"My trembling conqueror!" said Lady Rachel, as she pressed her to her heart, "who could guess that this slight and agitated frame was inspired by a spirit so vigorous and so steady? But tell me in one word, are you wholly victor? has his pride yielded?"

"It has," said Isabella. "He has fulfilled your conditions. He *does*

mourn the vice. He shrinks not from the punishment."

"Thank God!" said Lady Rachel; "then the principles instilled in his early years have not been given in vain; but no more—neither of you can support further emotion; think only that your trials are past; that you will be happy."

Mr. Willoughby returned; and now it was that he and Isabella fixed their eyes on each other with an earnest look of inquiry, as if to ask what changes had taken place in the countenances of either during the unhappy period of their separation. Each saw more than either cared to express; but the fondness with which Mr. Willoughby threw his supporting arm round Isabella's waist, and the tender pressure with which Isabella seized the hand of Mr. Willoughby, spoke their mutual grief for what they saw there.

“ This pale cheek is a rebel to your will, my Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby ; “ and tells tales of bitter reproach to me.”

“ Peace and love will restore all,” said Isabella ; and moved towards the door, eager to be once more under the roof of Lady Rachel ; and afraid that with the necessity for exertion she should lose the power.

CHAP. LIV.

“ Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ON their arrival at the house of Lady Rachel, she immediately condemned Isabella to the solitude of her own apartment; and delivered Mr. Willoughby to the affectionate care of Lord Burghley. Nor was she inattentive to the gratification of her absent friends.

Mr. Parr having seen Isabella safe under the protection of Lady Rachel,

had waited a few days in the hopes of being witness to some opening prospect of a re-union between her and Mr. Willoughby, but finding little appearance of this being the case, he had returned into Westmorland, having retained the willing Burghley as his regular intelligencer of all that might occur; and Lady Rachel now appointed him to the grateful task of communicating to their friends at Eagle's Crag, the happy tidings of Mr. Willoughby's restoration.

She had another task of the same kind to perform from which she anticipated much less pleasure. But no time was to be lost in informing Lady Jane Hastings of the change that had taken place in her daughter's situation.

Lady Rachel having therefore provided the best means for the recovery of both Isabella and Mr. Willoughby

from the effects of the violent agitation which they had undergone; and having secured to Mr. Parr and his daughter as early a participation as possible in their returning happiness, set forward on her visit to Lady Jane.

But, as she had foreseen, since she could not tell of renovated fortune, and reviving splendour, her intelligence was received with little pleasure or approbation.

Lady Jane coldly observed, “that for her part she had no hopes that Mr. Willoughby would abjure any of his follies. It was true that his connexion with Lady Charlotte was broken; strangely broken! she should never be able to understand that business; but he would find other Lady Charlotte’s, and such affairs were the least of the misfortunes that he had brought upon her child. She would never give her consent that she

should live in obscurity with him ; she ought to have every farthing that his ruinous proceedings had left him ; and if he had gone abroad with Lady Charlotte, the law must have given it to her. She could derive no comfort from the renewing of a connexion which she saw would end, finally, in reducing her daughter to beggary. She might express her feelings too warmly ; she hoped Lady Rachel would excuse her if she did ; but a mother must feel as one ; and after all that she had done to establish her child, to see all her labours baffled, and by such romantic arrangements, was very mortifying ; very hurting ; she did not blame Lady Rachel ; it was very natural ; very right that she should do the best for her nephew ; but she blamed Isabella ; who, if she had no consideration for herself, ought better to have regarded the interest of her son. When things

were come to such extremities, the law was the best way of settling them ; there was then no place for sentiment and generosity ; every thing was done in a fair and equal way ; and the offenders were the sufferers. But she would, with Lady Rachel's permission, see Mrs. Willoughby in the morning. She hoped nothing would be done without her concurrence ; and she should certainly, between her daughter and herself, freely express her opinions, and give her advice as it was the duty of a mother to do."

Lady Rachel replied to all this well bred effusion of wisdom and affection, with a sufficient quantity of general concession : she admitted, that no doubt much was to be allowed to the feelings of a mother. That nothing could be more just than that the law should settle what could not be better settled without its interference ; that

romance and sentiment were bad referees in matters of common sense; that charity forbade us to think the worst; that it was to be hoped Mrs. Willoughby would not forget the interest of her son; and that it could not be disputed, that all the social duties ought to keep their respective places, and be careful not to encroach upon each other. And having acknowledged the truth of all this fund of original thought, and deep reasoning, she assured Lady Jane that Mrs. Willoughby would be ready to attend to every thing that her ladyship's parental wisdom might see fitting to suggest; and then took her leave, wondering how an Isabella could be the offspring of a Lady Jane.

But although Lady Jane had no heart to understand the feelings of Lady Rachel, she had acuteness of head sufficient to comprehend that

ISABELLA.

she heartily despised her worldly wisdom ; and being aware that, with such an ally by her side, Isabella would never yield her actions to any other guidance, she prudently resolved not to expose her reptile arguments to the eagle swoop of Lady Rachel's principles ; and she therefore exchanged her purpose of visiting Isabella, for that of writing to her.

As her letter contained an epitome of all the rules by which the human animal may best fulfil the first law of its creation, “ the care of itself,” it is thought well worthy of a chapter of its own ; and is accordingly given as follows.

CHAP. LV.

“ Oh that you would altogether hold your peace,
and it should be for your wisdom.”

ANONYMOUS.

“ MY DEAR ISABELLA,

“ IT appears to me that after the indignities which you have received from Mr. Willoughby, and the ruin which he has brought upon you and your child, you ought not to have taken the decisive step of re-uniting yourself with him, without the sanction of a parent's advice. But, perhaps, you regard Lady Rachel as a

parent ; and no doubt she might give herself a right to be so considered ; but this seems to be out of the question. I heard no hint of any intention of remembering the relationship which subsists between her and Mr. Willoughby, even after her death ; and this being the case, you ought to have been aware that she must have an interest, for her nephew's sake, in direct opposition to yours, while I *can* only seek your good, in whatever I may suggest or advise.

“ I was wholly unprepared for this blow ; as, from all that I could collect, there was no reason to have believed that Mr. Willoughby would ever have been prevailed upon to live with you again. And in *this* he certainly judged rightly ; for what confidence or concord can be between you ? And in this circumstance the law would have compelled him to have provided for

you to the very extent, and, if possible, beyond the very extent of his power: and this too would have been only justice; for more than he can now give is your due, and he ought to be the only sufferer, as he has been the only offender.

“ I hinted something of this kind to you on Tuesday; but as you were then so feeble, and in such deep sorrow, and especially as I saw no danger of your having it in your power to act so imprudently as you have done, I forbore to urge you on the subject then, for which I reproach myself. I ought to have made every consideration give way to your real interest; and I ought to have provided against the possibility of what has happened.

“ But the mischief has been incurred; and all that can now be done is to prevent as much as may be your suffering from it.

“As far as I can judge, the only motive that can have prevailed with Mr. Willoughby to alter his purpose of quitting the kingdom alone (now I suppose you are to go together), must have been the very scanty share of that which his ruinous folly has left him, that in that case must have been at his disposal; and this is the very reason why you should never have consented to such an alteration of his plans.

“If you do not exert yourself to repair the mistake that you have made, I can easily foretell what will happen. You and your child will not only be exposed to all the miseries of poverty and neglect, while he squanders the poor remnant of that noble fortune which I thought that my prudence had made so securely yours, but you will be persuaded, or bullied, into giving up your settlement; and then,

good night to all your future prospects. The affluence which might yet be yours, will be for ever gone; and you and your boy may be beggars in the streets!

“ Perhaps you are not aware (for you were always strangely thoughtless of such matters) that although I took care that you should be nobly portioned, in case of Mr. Willoughby’s death, yet that I could not prevail for any settlement on your children; and your fortune being so small, it would not have been discreet to have urged this point too strenuously.

“ It seems the wisdom of the Willoughby family, like the foolish wisdom of the English law, ‘abhors entails;’ and you see the consequence — the wisdom and the property are like to end together. For your child’s sake, therefore, you ought never to be induced to give up your jointure. God

forbid that I should limit, even in thought, the life of any one ; but after the strange career that Mr. Willoughby has run (and I am told that he is extremely altered), nobody knows how soon you may be in possession of that part of his property ; and with such an advantage, in addition to your family distinctions, and your personal recommendations, if you don't destroy your beauty by your ill-placed grief, it is not presumptuous to expect that you may make a second marriage much superior to your first ; and by this means, probably, have it in your power in some degree to make up to your poor ruined boy the injuries that he has received from his father,—a consideration to which no maternal heart can be insensible.

“ I entreat that you will think seriously of all these things. I am willing to persuade myself that my present ad-

vice will not meet with the same neglect that attended the last I gave you. Had you listened to the suggestions of Lady Stanton and myself, conveyed to you through that degraded Lady Charlotte, none of these terrible things, which have brought such disgrace on our families, would have happened. You would have been safe, and at your ease in Westmorland; and she, poor wretched thing! would still have been sanctioned by the protection of her husband.

“ I shall never be able to understand the cause of her rupture with Mr. Willoughby; but I suppose it might arise from her being wise enough to refuse to share his broken fortunes, which ought to be a warning to you. Having quarreled with him, what could she do, but what she did? to humble herself before that vulgar tyrant whom she has made her master

was not to be thought of; and my brother's temper is so severe that I verily think, had she sought a shelter with him, that he would have shut her up for the rest of her life; for there is no man more jealous of his family honour than he is, for which he is much to be commended. My heart bleeds for my poor sister Stanton. And I am the last person in the world to say a word that would wound her feelings, or reflect upon her management; and although I certainly condemned the whole course of the education that she gave her daughters, as the least likely possible to lead to respectable establishments in the world, yet I am not ashamed to confess that I did not foresee *such* a finale; since nobody could take greater pains to impress upon their minds a more perfect horror of degradation, or more clearly set before them the necessity of restraining

themselves within the limits that the world's opinion has fixed, beyond which no woman who would keep her reputation can exceed. And certainly any excursion is the more unpardonable, as, it must be acknowledged, the bounds are not very narrow. But I have wandered from my subject. All this, Isabella, does not apply to you. I thank God, I have guarded you better ; and I have nothing to fear but a certain romantic disposition to indiscreet generosity, and forgetfulness of self, which, in fact, is the abandonment of one of the first of our duties ; I might say of all ; since, if we do not take care of ourselves, of whom shall we take care ?

“ This fault in your temperament I have never been able sufficiently to control ; it has, indeed been the primary cause of all your misfortunes.

You should earlier have stood upon your *rights*. But I cannot take much blame to myself on this score. The fault lay with Mrs. Obrien; who had certainly extraordinarily fine sentiments, but did not well know how to direct the application of them. And, indeed, the general inapplicability of such high-sounding words to any of the actual purposes of life, has often made me think that they had better be wholly left out in the process of a good education. They are little better than the gilded backs of wooden books, to fill up gaps, when the volumes of real use are not sufficient to furnish the library; they serve but to puzzle and confound, and often prevent the going the direct way to the end in view. Make use of this observation on the present occasion. The end that we have in view is, that you shall, as little as possible, partake of the distresses

that the follies of others have produced. Let no imaginary wife-like duty, or any Curtius' self-devotion, induce you to re-unite yourself with your husband, if such a measure of destruction can now, by any means, be avoided. But if in the state to which your precipitancy has brought matters this cannot be avoided (and the law is very unjustly severe against wives who *refuse* to live with their husbands); then, you must do nothing without the best legal advice (you know that we can command the highest in the kingdom) how most securely to put it out of your own power to be cheated or coaxed out of your future independency. Indeed, I *enjoin* you to do this, as you value your duty to me. Were I to use a less strong word, I should not do mine to you.

“There is certainly no alternative to your going abroad, if you are obliged

to adhere to your rashly renewed engagement with your indiscreet husband. It is, indeed, a measure that I would advise; for to live in England in your degraded state would be to aggravate all the evils to which you are exposed; and I will do Mr. Willoughby the justice to say, that, with all his faults, I believe he has too much spirit to submit to such a humiliation. I hope you have sufficient dignity of mind to be of the same opinion. But you must not think of Paris; nor would I yet have you hide yourselves in any very obscure provincial town, and so be quite forgotten. There are places to be found where you might still live with some little distinction, and where all you spend would *tell*. That is, indeed, the great advantage of a foreign residence; nobody knows the interior of the menage: provided the outside is a little glittering, nobody troubles

their head as to what is within. You ought to insist upon the choice being left to yourself, as some small return for the sacrifices that you have already made, and are still to make; and, if you do this, you may avail yourself of my advice in this particular, however strangely you may have neglected to resort to it upon so many more important points. I have, however, now endeavoured to remedy, as well as I can, the evils that are already incurred; and to obviate those which still hang over you.

“You may see, by the length of this letter, how important your interests are to me. It is not from *leisure* that I have taken the time necessary to write it; but I preferred writing to calling upon you at Lady Rachel’s. I know that she must naturally be inimical to my side of the question; and I did not think it well-bred, to come

into her house for the purpose of counteracting a mode of proceeding which she may think the most beneficial to the interests of her relation; besides which, I must confess that I was unwilling to run the risk of encountering Mr. Willoughby. It may be right in Lady Rachel (for it is not my way to judge any one) to receive him again under her roof; but I hope it will not be expected of me that I shall ever admit him under mine. A parent's feelings ought to be respected. Nor will I ever hold intercourse with him if I can help it. The same consideration that prevents me from visiting you at Lady Rachel's, makes me desire that you will not communicate the contents of this letter to her. Of course they must be a secret from your husband; both as I do not wish unnecessarily to offend him, and as his being aware of the warnings I have

given you, would probably render them inefficient. It may be more prudent not to let him discover that I am hostile to him ; and as this might appear, if I were to visit you, and to refuse to see him, I think it better that you should come to me. I *will* be at liberty to receive you any morning before one, which, you know, I neither would nor could engage to be for any one less dear to me than you are. Your sisters entirely agree with me in all my opinions. They long to see you ; but neither do they like to go to Lady Rachel's.

“ I think that we shall be able to bring the matter to bear, of which I gave you a hint the other day ; but I dare not speak with certainty. If things go on well, I will profit by my experience, and not expose Harriet to the inconveniences that you are exposed to, from having no pin-money ;

nor will I leave her offspring without a provision that cannot be dissipated by an extravagant father.

“God bless you, my dear child, and enable you to follow my counsels, and to profit by them.

“Ever your tenderly attached parent,
JANE HASTINGS.”

Lady Jane's precaution to conceal the advice which she so maternally pressed upon Isabella, was wholly unnecessary. Isabella would as soon have thought of revealing that her mother was a thief, as she would have disclosed such an exposition of her principles and opinions, either to Lady Rachel or to Mr. Willoughby. She felt as if she were almost guilty of a parricide in looking on such an exposure of the nakedness of the mind of a parent, and scarcely giving herself time to come to a conclusion of the paper, she

hastily committed it to the flames, earnestly wishing at the same time that she could blot its contents from her memory.

Thus would this valuable document of maternal wisdom have been lost to posterity, had not the higher estimate that its author made of its merits caused her to deposit a copy of it, entitled, “A copy of my letter to my daughter Willoughby, dissuading her from a re-union with her husband,” in the secret recesses of her private cabinet; from whence to be produced whenever any future contingency in the Hastings family might call for a similar effort of her talents and her zeal.

CHAP. LVI.

“ An angel's arms are round me!—no! a mortal's!
A mortal thing sublimed and beautified
By woes that would have broken many a heart!”

WILSON.

At any other period Isabella would have felt such an evidence of the want of integrity and generous feelings in the mind of a parent, as a real affliction; but at the present still dearer interests were at stake.

It required all the powers of her understanding to determine what course to pursue, and all the firmness of her

principle to abide the consequence of her decision.

She was as well aware as Lady Jane, that more than one path lay before her ; and that all were rugged. On the choice which she made must depend, not only all the happiness that she could hope for in life, but the peace of a self-acquitting conscience. The alternative lay between contending evils ; and to balance these fairly, and courageously to support the decision of the preponderating scale, was the arduous task that was appointed her.

But she had no longer to dread from Mr. Willoughby any opposition to whatever she might see best or fittest to be done. So absolute was become her dominion over his mind and his affections, that he was but as an infant in the hands of the tenderest of mothers. She felt her own responsibility but the more weighty.

That they were henceforth to live together, and that they could not but live in love and concord, were no longer matters of doubt; but how they were to live, and what proportion of the necessities or comforts of life they were to allow themselves, were questions of no easy decision. Justice and loftiness of spirit pointed one way; the prejudice of habit and self-indulgence another. Isabella's decision was made; but to impose it upon Mr. Willoughby in these the first moments of his enthusiastic astonishment and rapture was to hazard his after-repentance, and the abatement of his attachment to her. The choice, however, must be made; and every motive of honesty and delicacy called for its being made without delay.

The papers which had been transmitted from Roberts by Mr. Parr, and the clear and unsullied fairness of

every statement made by Mr. Willoughby to Lord Burghley, had put her in possession of every necessary particular on which the determination could be founded. But she felt that the choice must be Mr. Willoughby's, not hers; and she was now to put to the test whether his mind had indeed recovered that vigorous tone which would enable him at once to see what was right, and courage to pursue it, even to the cutting off a right hand, or the plucking out a right eye.

“ My dearest Willoughby,” said she, “ it appears from the disclosures which you have so kindly made to me, that the alternative which is offered to our choice is, either to sell Eagle's Crag out of hand, or to remove into some retired and unexpensive residence. If we pursue the first measure, we shall obtain an immediate affluence of property, sufficient to supply us with the means to

enjoy not only the comforts of life, but some of its luxuries and distinctions; and we may resume, although with an abatement of its splendour, our former career in the world. Should we, however, see in this mode of proceeding any thing that hurts our feelings, or that is at variance with our principles, we must resolve upon a long course of obscurity and self-denial; but we may calculate on the result as enabling us to transmit to our offspring the possessions of your ancestors, if not wholly undiminished, yet in such a state as will shield our memory from the reproach of injustice or improvidence. With you, my Willoughby, I am willing to share either fortune; and you have a right to make the option."

Isabella trembled as she made this statement; Mr. Willoughby trembled as he heard it. But neither of them

knew from what feeling the emotion of the other arose.

“ My dear Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, his voice quivering with agitation as he spoke, “ I ought to have no vote in this decision. I have but too well proved that I am an unworthy guardian of my wife and child. You must alone determine.”

“ If,” said Isabella, “ you could submit your wishes as implicitly to me as you do with so much kindness your verbal assent, I should then have no difficulty in my choice ; for you would be equally happy either way. But the will cannot be thus passive ; and as much of the good or evil which belongs to either side of the alternative must depend upon the concurrence of the will in whatever is done, we must rather seek to determine *that* to what is best and most right, than rashly un-

dertake what we shall be unable to perform."

Mr. Willoughby was silent. His eyes were fixed on the ground; his colour went and came. Isabella's heart palpitated; she dreaded to hear his voice.

At length, casting a hasty glance on Isabella, and instantly withdrawing it,

"My beloved," said he, with much emotion, "*I never can make* this decision! How can I doom you to deprivation and obscurity?"

Isabella's heart was still.

"Can you rather," said she, "divest yourself of the inheritance of your fathers? Can you give your son a right to reproach your memory?"

"Is it possible," said he, starting up, and eagerly embracing her, "is it possible that you can *wish*, at every conceivable inconvenience to yourself, to enable me to repair the wrongs that

I have done to my boy? to give me a right once more to be at peace with myself?"

"Is it possible," said Isabella, with a smile, and with the tone of the fondest love, "is it possible that you should doubt it?"

"I know," said he, "that you would have shared any straits of poverty with me, if such had been my inevitable lot; but here is an option, an option that you have a right to make;—that you may make without injustice; that in some respects might perhaps be made with advantage. And do you wave every selfish consideration, and offer yourself a sacrifice on the altar of my folly?"

"I know not the words *yours* and *mine*," said Isabella. "I know not how to distinguish them in my understanding, or my feeling. *Your* happiness is *my* happiness; *your* honour *my*

honour ; *your* integrity *my* integrity. These are jewels that, although they may not sparkle in the hair, will rest within the breast ; and when self-denial shall have redeemed too lavish a self-indulgence, and exemplary conduct have obliterated the remembrance of former thoughtlessness, then may we raise up our heads in the honest confidence of virtue, and allow our hearts to rejoice in the happiness that our own efforts have given us. And what is there in all this like waving any selfish consideration ? — of offering ourselves *sacrifices* on *any* altar ? The mind's health, my Willoughby, is nothing else but virtue ; and shall we so assiduously cater for the body, that must perish, and neglect the welfare of the soul, that shall exist to all eternity !”

“ Dearest ! best ! most lovely ! most beloved !” said the enraptured Willoughby ; “ with what sweet flowers do

you strew the rugged path of duty ; let us then tread it together ! and should I sometimes stumble at the roughnesses in the way, your kind arm will be ready to support me ; while with steadier pace you keep right onward to the reward in view."

" Dear Willoughby," said Isabella, " if you make my progress thus happy, shall I not be apt to forget that there is any heaven beyond it ? But come, let us hasten to rejoice the heart of our dear Lady Rachel : she knew that the important decision was to rest with you ; and I may now redeem my pledge, that you would make it under the control of reason and of virtue."

With these words, and on the wings of joy, Isabella flew to Lady Rachel :

" Bless your children ! my dear Lady Rachel," said she ; " from henceforth we shall be worthy of your love."

" You do not then sell Eagle's Crag ?" said Lady Rachel.

“ Oh, no, no !” cried they both in a breath ; “ for the world would we not part with that dear inheritance.”

“ And how do you propose to live ?” said Lady Rachel, in a tone that totally disappointed the expectations of Isabella ; and turned back the tide of pleasure, which but the moment before had flowed through every vein.

“ My dear Lady Rachel,” said Isabella, “ why such a question ? where will be the difficulty ? Shall we not have sufficient for all the wants of virtue ?”

“ And shall you have no other wants ?” said Lady Rachel.

“ No, no !” said Isabella, earnestly. “ I answer for us both.”

“ Isabella !” said Mr. Willoughby, “ Lady Rachel sees the sacrifice which you are so generously willing to make in its true light. I ought not to have been overcome by the enthusiasm

even of your love, of your virtue! it shall be the last *selfish* feeling to which I will ever yield. Eagle's Crag shall be sold!"

"Then, I will become the purchaser," said Lady Rachel; "and give it to — Isabella."

"Oh, my dear madam," cried Isabella, with an accent of distress, "you are too good, too kind to trifle with our feelings: what can this mean? what are we to understand by this?"

"That I adopt you as my daughter," said she, throwing her arms around Isabella: "that I endow you with all the accumulated property that belonged to that sacred name. My dear Willoughby," continued she, turning to her nephew, "take from my hand, the child of my love; the most perfect emanation of the divine Nature which has yet visited our earth! I need not bid you love her; she has made it im-

possible that you should do otherwise. But cherish her, imitate her ! and may the God of all mercy bless you through succeeding generations !”

Surprise, joy, gratitude ; with a thousand mingled sensations, from recollections of the past, and consciousness of the present, threw Mr. Willoughby in speechless emotion at the feet of Lady Rachel, while the more chastened and unmixed feelings of Isabella, caused her to cling fondly to the arm of her benefactress, and gaze upon her with the ardent eye of grateful affection.

“ Rise, my dear Willoughby,” said Lady Rachel ; “ now no longer the object of my direst apprehensions, and of my saddest regrets ! but the cherished offspring of a beloved sister, who, even on the throne of bliss, will join the hallelujah of angels, for the repentance of a sinner. My Isabella,

you have thought my discipline severe; but the ingot is come forth from the fire pure gold. No fear for the future need now disturb your bliss. He who has been tried, and has stood the trial, as this poor culprit has done, is more to be depended upon than one who had never fallen. Willoughby, look up! let your eye meet mine; never more to sink under its scrutinizing fixture, as it has so often done in times no more to be remembered; take to your protection my dearest child: in committing her to your care, I prove the confidence that I have in the renewal of your hereditary virtues; and in making you an *unrestrained* sharer in a gift which I had dedicated wholly to her use, I recognize your identity. We will kill the fatted calf, and repair in company to keep the feast at Eagle's Crag!"

CHAP. LVII.

“Surer to prosper, than prosperity
Could have assured us.”

MILTON.

THAT neither Isabella, nor Mr. Willoughby died of joy, I think it not more than necessary to declare in express terms; although it may perhaps require more credit as an historian, than I can flatter myself that I possess, to make it believed.

But infidelity does not injure truth; and if any one will take the trouble of making a journey into Westmorland,

and can there discover that stately mansion and princely domain so celebrated in these volumes, they will there find living witnesses of my veracity.

Nor are Mr. Willoughby and Isabella the only happy persons who bless and are blest in that remote county.

The ardent Burghley, having danced and sung, laughed and wept, and embraced every man, woman, and child, that came in his way, declared that the information which was to be conveyed to Eagle's Crag was of too holy a nature to be thrown into the general mass of miscellaneous tidings intrusted to the care of the vulgar post ; that an especial messenger must be appointed to the office, and that he would himself be that messenger.

No one was inclined to dispute his claim ; but he set not forward on his

journey until he had provided himself with letters of credit from Lord Burghley, by which he was authorised and entitled to woo and to win the fair Catherine if he *could*. The task was not a difficult one.

She was already half won ; and the delighted approbation which her father expressed of the sentiments of her heart, secured that heart wholly to Mr. Burghley.

If the first festival held at the mansion of the ancient family of the Willoughby's, celebrated the return of of "the prodigal," the second was honoured by the union of unspotted innocence and uncorruptible integrity. And that there might be no interruption to the happiness either of Isabella or Catherine, from the new connexion thus formed by the latter, a residence was found for the happy

pair, in the midway between Eagle's Crag and Fell-beck.

The excellent, the venerable Mr. Parr, now *almost* restored to happiness, continued still to call the latter place his home; but he was so frequently an inhabitant of the apartments assigned to his use, both at Eagle's Crag, and Raven's Tearne, as to leave it doubtful whether he thought it so.

Lady Rachel also retained her house in town; but she found so many charms during the summer in Westmorland, and so much difficulty in quitting it in winter, that she too was rather a resident than a visitor.

Thus surrounded by their friends, and blest by each other, Mr. Willoughby and Isabella, in offering up their thanksgivings for the manifold blessings that were bestowed upon them, failed not to acknowledge, that the afflictions with which they had been

visited, were the most precious of them all.

A few words, and only a few, on a less grateful subject.

Mr. Dunstan hastened to fulfil the wishes of Lady Charlotte, by dissolving the union between them finally and completely. But speedy as were his movements to effect this purpose, they could not outrun the fleeting connexion which had been so suddenly formed between Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles Seymour. A very few weeks put an end to an arrangement from which they were to have been "the happiest of creatures!" and Sir Charles thought himself bound neither by the "fair hand" of the lady, nor by his "honour as a gentleman," to renew it in a form that would give Lady Charlotte a legal right to be a torment to him for the remainder of his life.

Dissension first, and desertion afterwards, if it could not make Lady Charlotte virtuous, made her at least heartily sick of vice; but it being more easy to raise the evil spirits of darkness than to lay them, she continued the unwilling slave to all those raging passions, which she had hoped to make the instruments of torment to others; and having to do with the vindictive disposition of Mr. Dunstan, which, in seeking to inflict punishment, found no means better fitted to his sordid apprehension than the imposition of poverty, she remains for the rest of her life equally indigent and despised.

Nor did Sir Charles Seymour escape without a competent retribution for the evil of his doings. Afraid to return to his native land, where shame and scorn await him, he continues a wanderer upon foreign

ground, unwillingly atoning, by a life of unceasing mortification and excruciating recollections, his offences perpetrated against Morna, and meditated against Isabella!

In having delineated the excellences of self-command in an Isabella, I feel persuaded that I have only sketched a picture, the original of which will be recognized in many a virtuous breast—" *Ed Io anche son' Pittore!* "

But I am prepared to be told, that no such a monster as Lady Charlotte is to be found.

As well may it be denied that the minute germ in the bosom of the acorn can expand into the lofty and extensive oak, as that the corrupt propensities of the human heart, unchastened by discipline, and unrestrained by principle, will not grow up into the

full stature of every atrocity that ever disgraced the name of man.

If then, in shewing the fruits I hold forth a warning against the culture of the root, let me rather be considered as the guardian than as the calumniator of human nature; and let not the instructors of youth allow any of the wide spreading branches of “dignified spirit,” “emulation,” “the point of honour,” or justice to self,” to shelter from their exterminating hook, — Pride, — Envy, — Revenge, — or Malice.

THE END.

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